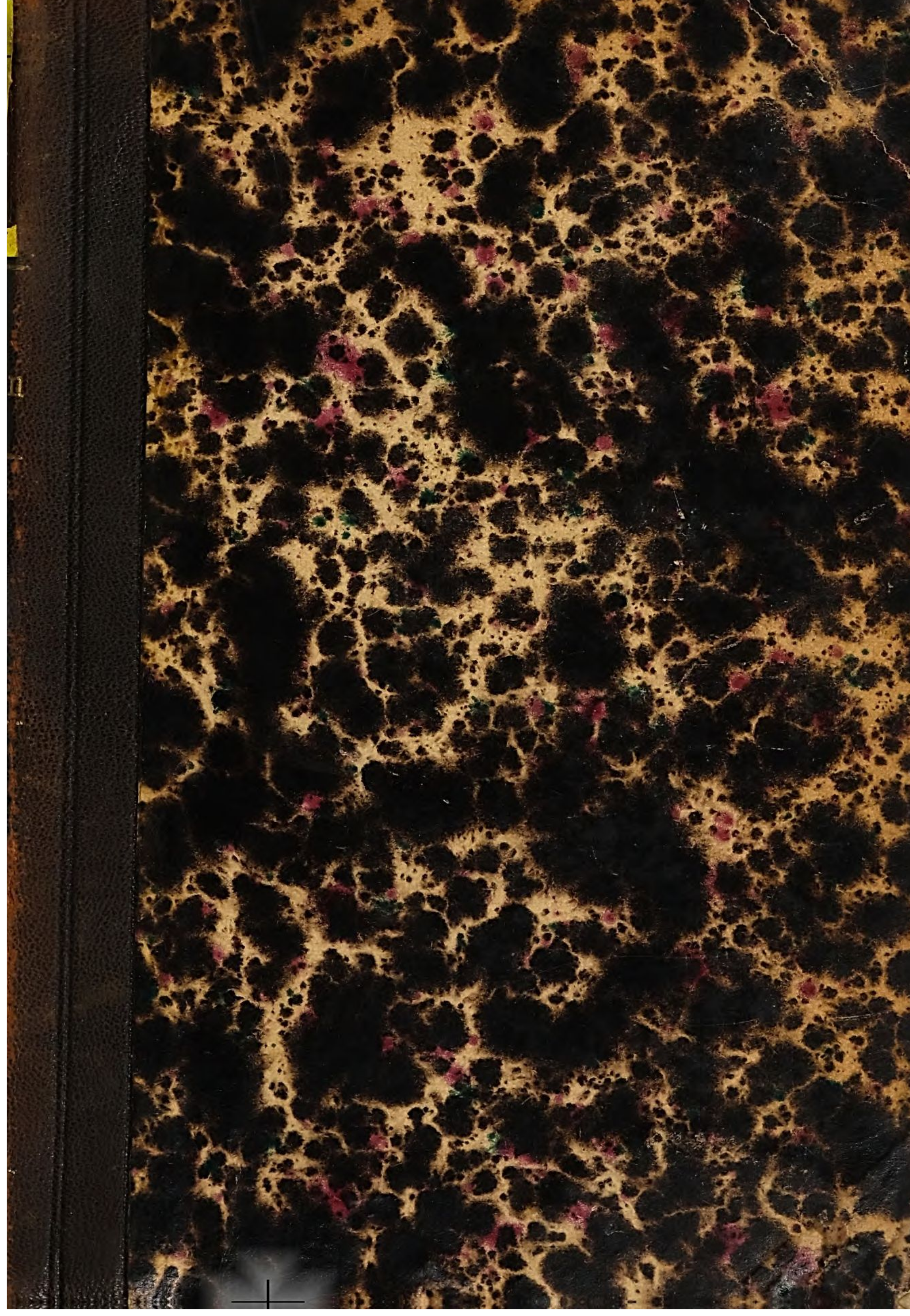




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BY

OF

CHARLES GIBBON

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'ROBIN GRAY,' 'QUEEN OF THE MEADOW,' ETC.

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THE GOLDEN SHAFT.

CHAPTER I.

THE MINISTER'S GARDEN.

"I'LL alloo, minister, that ye ken Greek and Laetan roots better nor me; but you maun admit in your ain conscience that you canna even yoursel' to me in the matter o' dung for the roots o' plants."

"I mean to have guano, Matthey Kirkpatrick, and I have no more to say."

The minister was delving vigorously in his garden, and the dispute between him and his man was in regard to the important question of natural or artificial manure.

Mr. Moffat called himself a young old-fashioned minister, but Matthey was the most uncompromising

of old-fashioned minister's men. He had been with the minister ever since he had had a kirk, and in his patronage of his master he was "ten times waur nor a wife," as Mr. Moffat often told him, with a threat of introducing that useful officer of the household in the place of the submissive Jean Morrison, the housekeeper. Matthey was not frightened: he only said that he "couldna be fashed wi' sic nonsense," and went on his own way in spite of the minister's threats.

In a town Matthey's interference would have been regarded as insolence; in the country it was accepted as the personal interest of the servant in the affairs of the master.

But Matthey knew that when the minister addressed him by his full name the limit of his patience had been reached. So he proceeded to the business which had brought him to the place where the minister was delving.

"Aweel, hae your ain way, minister, but you'll be sorry for't gin this time next year. The Fiscal's wife wants to see you."

"I thought somebody had come," said the minister dryly, "or you would not have been here when I told you to clear away thae weeds. Eh, Matthey, Matthey, how can you expect me to heed what you say about the dung when you

winna pay attention to what I say about the weeds!"

"Oh, but I'm gaun to have a day at them soon."

"Very well, begin wi' the weeds in your ain head and announce Mrs. Musgrave properly. Look at me; make a bow like that and say, 'If you please, sir, Mrs. Musgrave.' Syne hand me her card on a salver."

"Noo, minister, there's nae use flytin' at me about thae things," replied Matthey dourly. "I hae tould ye afore I canna do them. She gie'd me a caert an' I put it on the table. What need had I to fetch it to you when I kent weel eneugh what it was? Get Jean to answer the door if you're no pleased."

"Any way you might say—just to oblige me—Mrs. Musgrave, instead of the Fiscal's wife, as though she was naebody."

"Weel, to obleege you—here's Mrs. Musgrave."

The lady herself was coming down the path from the house at the moment, and the minister had no time to give his man the admonition he had intended. So Matthey moved away as the minister placed a garden chair for his visitor.

"I hope I see you well, Mrs. Musgrave. I

was just about to go in to red myself up in proper array to see you, but that villain Matthey has only this instant told me you were here."

"Thank you, Mr. Moffat, but I would rather be out here; and please do not let me interrupt your work."

"There's no fear of interruption, Mrs. Musgrave. One of the greatest blessings of Adam's work is that a man can chat or think, and delve or prune, or plant all the same. I am at the simplest of all the grades, only delving, and well-pleased to have a crack with a sensible being like yourself after being worried by that gowk Matthey."

"I will not detain you long, I hope, for this is only a flying call, as one might say. I have just returned with Ellie from the Dinwuddies, and circumstances have arisen which compel me to seek the unbiassed opinion of some close friend of the family. I could not think of a better or truer friend than you, Mr. Moffat, and so I am here."

The minister bowed, dropping his hat on the gravel, as he wiped the perspiration from his brow. He observed that Mrs. Musgrave, although looking gracious and stately as usual, was somewhat agitated. He ceased digging.

"I'll be delighted to serve you in any way, and if it's only a matter of opinion, you know how easily everybody gives that."

"Yes, but this is a serious matter, and you, above all men, are qualified to answer me. I ask in a spirit of earnestness, being desirous of doing my duty to one who is dear to me."

She was still smiling, but he could see that tears were not far off. Placing one foot on his spade, he rested his elbow on the hand which grasped it, and looked gravely at her.

"In that case I will answer as earnestly as you ask."

"Then will you tell me, Mr. Moffat," she inquired with a dignified inclination of the head, "what is the limit of a mother's authority?"

"*Unlimited* for good, and it should have no place at all for evil."

"I thought so," she exclaimed, as if much relieved. "Then, as it is entirely for Ellie's good I am acting, I want you to tell me what I can do to prevent her marrying John Armour."

The minister was astounded by the request; but at the same time his sense of humour was tickled by the notion that he should be asked to mar the union he had in some degree helped to

promote. So he rested his cheek on the knuckles of his hand as he replied thoughtfully:

"I would just like to know why that should be, Mrs. Musgrave."

"Why! —there are most serious reasons why, Mr. Moffat, and you must be aware of some of them."

"So far, Mrs. Musgrave, I will admit that it is within my knowledge the young folk have agreed to cleek thegither, and I know of no reason why they should not. This, however, I will undertake to say, that if you can show me serious reasons to the contrary, I will show you how to prevent the match being struck. But we had better go indoors."

He dropped the spade, picked up his hat, and with an old-fashioned courtesy proffered his arm and conducted her into the manse.

Mrs. Musgrave's grandeur demanded nothing less than that she should be shown into the best room of the manse. Jean Morrison's idea of the room which should be considered the best—and in this she was sturdily supported by Matthey Kirkpatrick, his sworn feud against womankind in general and Jean in particular, notwithstanding—was that it should be the one which was never used except by visitors about whom you did not care enough to ask them into the place where you lived.

The minister's notion was that the best room was the one in which he spent most of his time—where all his books and his papers were stowed, and where in short he lived not only the greater part of his time but the truest and noblest part of his life.

On the present occasion, therefore, maybe it was on account of Matthey's persistence in regard to that question of guano—he led his visitor into his own room.

He closed the door carefully, placed a large easy-chair for her, and somehow, as she sank into it, the grey-headed little minister seemed to grow bigger and grander there amongst his books than the plain commonplace looking man she had found digging in the garden.

His manner seemed to change, too.

“Now, Mrs. Musgrave, I am waiting for you to show cause why John Armour should not marry your daughter.”

He did not sit down; he stood on the hearth-rug, his hands under his coat, waggling it as if it were a bantam's tail as he paused for his reply.

Much to her amazement, she found a difficulty in giving a definite reply. Brought at once to strict account, she was conscious that the

answer which had satisfied herself would not satisfy anybody who did not share her prejudices and predilections.

But she could be honest with herself, and failing any other argument she confessed the real position.

"You see, Mr. Moffat, the spheres in which my daughter and Mr. Armour have moved are quite distinct; and I believe that, although she may incline to the man at present, she would soon repent and be miserable herself and make him miserable. My experience of the world enabling me to see that, I consider it a most serious reason why I should for my daughter's sake protest against such a union."

"Quite right, my dear madam, and there is no reason why you should not protest. At this moment I am not prepared with authorities, but I have no doubt that Eve protested when her bairns were about to wed. At any rate it has been the privilege of mothers to protest since her time; and it has been the deplorable habit of children to mate with the folk they like best in spite of the protest. You have not made out your case, I am afraid."

"But you said that a mother's control was unlimited."

"Exactly—for good. But how can you say that your opposition to her settlement with the man of her choice is for her good? Is he a black-guard? Is he a beggar? I know John Armour, and I know that he is neither one nor the other. You must find a better reason than that before I can keep my promise and show you how to break off the match."

"I want her to marry a gentleman of position,—the scion of an ancient family, who has been long courting her, and has asked for her hand in marriage."

There was a short pause, and then the minister gravely:

"Now, that is a real sensible and therefore understandable reason, and I can show you how to put all things right at once."

"How?" she inquired eagerly.

"Go to Armour himself, and I will pledge my faith in human nature that if you satisfy him your daughter will be happier with another man than with him, he will not only withdraw from the list of competitors for her hand, but will help you with all his power to make her happy."

Mrs. Musgrave rose. Not the minister's argument, but a fancy of her own, had suggested the course he now proposed.

"I will see Mr. Armour," she said condescendingly; "Thank you."

CHAPTER II.

MANŒUVRING.

THE minister conducted the stately dame to her carriage, and she was particularly gracious as she chatted about the weather. "Did Mr. Moffat think it would rain to-day?" "The evenings are becoming cold now, are they not?" "We shall soon be into winter again. Dear me, what a short summer this seems to have been." Then she reiterated her thanks effusively and drove away, leaving the minister standing at his gate, looking after her with an amused yet puzzled expression.

There was the long yellow-grey road stretching down to the village through its channel of larch, and hawthorn hedges, and loose stone dykes, through the houses and winding over the billowy fields beyond, now disappearing altogether behind some dark plantation and again flashing out like a streak of sunshine across the deep green pastures.

The picture was familiar to him; but he was

always discovering new graces in it—new combinations of light and shade, when the trees were bare, waving skeleton arms and fingers over the white ground or over the fields bespeckled with flowers of snow and diamonds of frost; through the periods of bud and blossom to the full foliage; or when, as now, the fallen leaves danced and trembled like narrow brown streamlets along the roadsides with many splutterings across the open way, whilst overhead was a glory of many colours in the sunlight.

But at this moment the minister's vision was fixed upon that one object now fast disappearing: the carriage conveying Mrs. Musgrave straight to Armour's mill—from the tall chimney of which the smoke rose darkly in the clear air, swaying towards the approaching visitor one moment as if to welcome her, and the next swirling back as if shrinking from her.

"Now is that silly woman going to make mischief between two sensible young folk? She is a giddy old body; but nevertheless it is one of the most wonderful mysteries of human life how it comes about that wee things have been endowed with such great powers of doing harm."

"Am I to yoke Dawnie the-noo, or are you gaun to wait till after dinner?"

Matthey Kirkpatrick was the speaker, and Dawnie was the minister's pony.

"Meat and mass hinder no man, Matthey, as you are well aware, and therefore I think we'll bide till after dinner. The more readily as, if my nostrils do not deceive me, there is a sweet sheep's head in Jean Morrison's pot. Meanwhile I want you to read me a riddle."

"Hoots, I hae nae time for bairns' play. I want to get a heap o' thae plants potted afore nicht."

"Ay, but bide a wee, Matthey, bide a wee. This is no bairns' play, but matter for most serious consideration. It is a subject which has occupied the mind of the wisest and the simplest since the days of Adam; and it still remains like the philosopher's stone—an unsettled problem, still attracting all men to the endeavour to solve it, and still compelling wise men in their age to own that their endeavours have been vain. Firstly, Solomon was ——"

"Oh, skip the heads, minister, and come to lastly, an' in conclusion first, or I'll never get through my wark."

"Just, so, just so," continued the minister placidly, and smiling at his hearer's impatience; "you are like the rest: in everything except life

we all want the lastly first. In our fortunes, which we always expect to increase, we strive for the lastly, and in our misfortunes we cry for it. But in this particular matter, as we e'en must end where we began, I will unfold to you at once the trouble of my mind — I am vastly exercised to comprehend what a woman means."

Matthey looked at his master with a slight frown, as if suspecting that he was trying to make fun of him; but seeing that the minister was perfectly serious, his expression became one of lofty wonderment and pity.

"Eh, minister, has it come to that! You wantin' to ken what a woman means! Eh, minister, minister, wi' a' your learnin' hae you come to that?"

"It's true, Matthey, with humiliation be it spoken."

"To think that you would fash your head seeking to ken what a woman means! She never kens hersel', and how can onybody else ken. You might as weel try to find out what air the wind will be blawin' this time a hunner years hence."

"I believe that would be the easier task of the two. Thank you, Matthey. I daily learn to appreciate your wisdom more and more, and will pot waste time in the futile pursuit of the psycho-

logical key to the female intellect, but will presently convey your words of comfort to one who will be as much puzzled as myself and a great deal more bothered by the question which I propounded to you."

Matthey took up his barrow and wheeled it away towards the other end of the garden, whilst the minister, with hands clasped behind him, sauntered in the same direction. Notwithstanding his acceptance of Matthey's theory of the utter inutility of trying to find out what a woman means, Mr. Moffat could not help repeating to himself:

"What is it she is going to do? Does she think that flyting will make John Armour give up his dearie? Or does she think she can frighten him with her dignity, or reason him into the belief that he is no fit mate for her daughter? . . . No, no, Mrs. Musgrave, you will never do that, and why you canna let them be, passes my understanding."

Why she could not let them be was because she wanted the arrangements to be otherwise. That was substantial enough reason for her.

She had accepted promptly the minister's suggestion that she should speak to Armour herself because she had previously thought of it, and was at that moment inspired by one of her clever

ideas—as clever an idea as that of the visit to her friends the Dinwuddies. True, she was obliged to acknowledge that in some respects the visit had failed in its main design to keep Ellie away from Armour. But it had been successful in this: it had brought about an understanding between Fenwick and herself, and that was something accomplished. True, also, she had expected to accomplish much more before the return to Torthorl: there had been a momentary fancy that she might have succeeded in taking some definite step towards the breaking off of the match; but she did not feel that she had yet done so.

She could no longer affect to treat the idea as one of the Fiscal's preposterous jokes, for Ellie had said to her almost as soon as they got into the house:

“Mamma, when you have had a rest, I want to speak to you about something very particular.”

“What is it, child?” Mrs. Musgrave had inquired, although she knew quite well what it was.

And then Ellie blushed a little as she made answer:

“It is about Mr. Armour. I want you to understand our position. I thought my father would have explained everything to you——”

"I wish you would not speak to me about him to-day. Do give me this one day of rest—the subject agitates and vexes me so much," the mother had pleaded.

"Very well, mamma—to-morrow."

Mrs. Musgrave saw that there was no longer any escape from a full understanding of the position, and if that were brought about, of course Fenwick would be obliged to cease all pretensions to Ellie's hand. That would never do. Somehow the public announcement of the engagement must be delayed: and in the delay she might find the coveted opportunity to break off the match altogether. The Fiscal had declared he would not take back his word unless one of the lovers asked him; and such a thing might happen, unlikely as it seemed now.

The obstinacy of her weak nature imparted unusual energy to her actions; and she started off immediately to take counsel with the minister. But he was as resolute an advocate for the paper-maker as the others. Mrs. Musgrave could not understand it. What was it they all found in this man that she could not find? She was irritated, and became the more obstinately opposed to him the more they praised him.

Then had flashed upon her the clever idea

with which she drove off to Armour's mill, and she smiled with much approval of her own genius and prospect of success.

"At any rate it will be a proof whether he is the noble, generous person they all wish me to believe him. Should he refuse to do what I want, then I can speak my mind, and they will not have the power to contradict me. If he consents—well, we will have time, and there is no saying what may happen."

She was charmed with the idea. She was not going to "flyte," or to try to frighten Armour. She was about to adopt with him the same tactics which had always hitherto proved so effective with Ellie.

She was not going to the house: she was going to the mill; there he fancied he could not help being more considerate to her than he would be even in his own house, for he would be surrounded by all the coarse machinery of his trade. Not that she expected him to fail in courtesy anywhere: he had proved at the Dinwuddies that he could be agreeable. But she fancied that her appeal would be the more effective when he felt the contrast between her own dignified, refined person and the things which surrounded him.

Armour was busy in his private office over

some papers of a portentous and disagreeable business character. They were large sheets of figures, ranged in long orderly columns and squares with straight and diagonal red lines, like uncovered veins leading up to the great heart of every man's business—the balance. As he turned over sheet after sheet his countenance expressed increasing dissatisfaction.

He was surprised by the announcement that Mrs. Musgrave desired the favour of a few moments' conversation. He laid aside the sheets of accounts, and instantly went out himself.

Mrs. Musgrave was stepping out of her carriage.

"I hope you will not think it is too great an intrusion, Mr. Armour, but I would prefer speaking to you here, thank you, rather than trouble to take you away from your office. I know you must be very busy at this hour, and your time is so much more valuable than mine."

He led her through the busy, but quiet outer office into his own room. There was a loud hum of machinery about the place which to her sensitive ears was quite deafening; but there was nothing coarse or uncleanly in his office any more than in that of the late Lord of Session—indeed, she was obliged to own with secret chagrin that

it looked much smarter than the great lawyer's had ever done. She felt spiteful at this disappointment. He had no business to be better in any respect than her people—at least he had no business to have things so arranged that he should for a moment make her think that he thought himself as good as her people had been, for presently she detected vulgarity in the very neatness of the place. A man of intellectual occupation could not afford time for such details as the removal of dust. That was the province of tradesmen who wished to attract customers. The discovery of this distinction restored her self-possession, and she regarded with what she would herself have called a pitying respect, the efforts of this poor tradesman to keep his place tidy. A gentleman did not require such adventitious aids.

So she was again gracious and dignified when she took the chair Armour offered her.

"I see you are surprised, Mr. Armour, and indeed you could not help being so at my presence here. I assure you I would not have disturbed you for any less reason than the one which brings me here."

She used her smelling-bottle ostentatiously, as if she would indicate that the smell of the place

would have been enough to keep her away under ordinary circumstances.

Armour, sitting on his high stool, his elbow resting on the high desk, looked at her smiling, with a respectful but amused curiosity.

"I am pleased to see you, Mrs. Musgrave, and thank whatever may have been the motive-power of your coming here for the pleasure of seeing you. If you have any interest in the process of the manufacture of paper I shall be delighted to go over the works with you."

"Motive-power"—"process of manufacture"—how truly vulgar the man was. As if a lady could take any interest in motive-power or process of manufacture!

She smiled with condescending forgiveness for his ignorance.

"No, thank you, Mr. Armour, it was no sudden interest in 'manufactures' which brought me here. It is an affair of quite another kind."

"I shall be happy to attend to you," said Armour, beginning to surmise what was coming.

"Happy to attend to you?" the very words of a butcher or baker or any other shopkeeper. What could Ellie see in such a man to give him an instant's precedence over such a gentle-

man as Hugh Fenwick of Cluden Peel? Mrs. Musgrave was aware that there was no accounting for tastes, but she intended her daughter to learn what was correct taste in the judgment and selection of a husband.

Still she was a little awkward in the presence of this good-natured, self-possessed man, who seemed to be eager to do anything to please her and yet was so very frankly independent.

"The subject is an embarrassing one, and I imagine you can guess something of its nature," she said with a smile, as if inviting him to come to her assistance.

Of course he knew that it was about Ellie she wanted to speak, and for a moment there was a malicious inclination to leave her entirely to herself and enjoy her throes of awkwardness, of assumed meekness and of vain diplomacy. But he cast that idea aside, the subject was too serious to him to permit of any playing with it.

"I understand what you refer to, Mrs. Musgrave. You desire to speak to me about your daughter Ellie."

"Yes," she said a little nervously, the man was so clear and resolute. Most certainly the day

of serfs was over. "And about the sort of understanding there was between you."

"The understanding is perfectly clear, Mrs. Musgrave, to the Fiscal, Ellie, and myself. I intended to speak to you to-day or to-morrow. Your visit has forestalled me only by a few hours. The understanding is this—that as soon as arrangements can be properly made Ellie and I are going to be married."

And he stood there and told her that to her face, and there was not an earthquake! That horrid machinery went on with its dull din as if nothing implying a social revolution had been spoken. It was incomprehensible how the world could go on in such a state of things.

"That is the subject, Mr. Armour; and I regret to say that you cannot have *my* consent to any such foolish step."

"I don't see anything foolish about it, and neither does she," exclaimed the lover, contentedly.

"But, Mr. Armour, it cannot be," she said with piteous earnestness.

"Why not, Mrs. Musgrave?"

The man's obtuseness was dreadful.

"I have told you that you cannot have my

consent, and Ellie will not marry anyone without it."

Thereat Armour was silent; for he could well understand that Ellie's sense of duty might even carry her so far as to submit to the unreasonable command of her mother that she should not marry him—he knew that nothing would induce her to accept another. Then he had somehow imbibed a little of the old-world superstitious respect for parental authority, and he did not like to enter into single combat with her on the subject. If he had to defend himself, he would rather do it in the presence of the whole family.

Mrs. Musgrave misunderstood his silence, and took courage.

"I know, Mr. Armour, that it must be difficult—perhaps impossible, for you to comprehend why I should refuse to consent; and I can quite fancy you may even doubt my word when I tell you that I refuse because I love my child and because I believe that her future happiness would be marred by the union you propose."

She rose, and there were tears in her eyes. There was no mistaking that sign of genuine feeling, however stiff her words might be, and Armour was troubled.

"Are you quite sure that you are a better

judge than herself and her father as to her prospect of happiness with me?" he asked huskily and looking down.

"I am perfectly sure of it. I am a woman and have had experience of the world. I have had more time than you or my husband can have to think of these matters, and to observe their progress in the case of others; and I am satisfied that, cruel as it may seem to you both now, I am acting with the truest kindness towards you in doing all in my power to prevent your marriage with my daughter."

"But why, Mrs. Musgrave, why?" he asked a little bewildered.

"There are so many . . . so many delicate points in all such matters, that I cannot easily explain myself. But there is no disrespect to you, Mr. Armour. Far from it. I prove my high respect for you in coming here to ask you to help me to secure the happiness of my child."

He looked up astounded by this extraordinary appeal. But for her tears and her earnestness he would have laughed at the absurdity of it.

"But, Mrs. Musgrave, how can you expect

me to help you to do what would make me miserable and what I believe to be wrong?"

"I do not you expect you to take my view of it at once—that would be more than any one could expect. What I ask is very simple, and if you are the gentleman I take you to be you will not refuse to grant it."

"I will gladly do anything except give up Ellie."

"No, you cannot do that at my request—I never thought you could. All I ask is that you will make no public announcement of an engagement for a little while, until you have had time to study her character more intimately and she has had time to—time to—in fact time to make up her mind."

"We can wait," he exclaimed, with intense relief, "if that is all you require and it will give you any satisfaction."

"Ah, that is so kind of you—so very good of you, Mr. Armour; but it is not the waiting which is of importance. The *very* important point is to leave her quite free to alter her mind."

"She is always free to do that," he ejaculated cheerfully. He could afford to smile at the idea of Ellie changing her mind.

"That is as it should be, and you would not blame her if she should discover that in what has passed between you she had made a mistake."

"If any such thing should occur I would be the first to cry off."

"That is sensible—so very kind. You don't know how much good it has done me to have this chat with you—how I wish that I had come to you at the first. But now, Mr. Armour, you understand that the most important thing of all is to prevent folk talking. Should the least hint of an engagement be given, it would become the talk of the town in a few hours. You know how people *will* talk, and if you could only think how many well meaning couples are forced into miserable marriages because they are afraid of the scandal a breach would make! It is wrong—it is wicked."

"You may be quite sure Ellie and I will not commit that wickedness."

"Yes, but we must avoid gossip, we must avoid scandal. And if you would—oh, Mr. Armour, if you only would tell the Fiscal that you do not want the matter to be made public yet awhile, you would make me so happy."

"I will mention your wish, and tell him that I can see no objection to it. Ellie would like

everything to be arranged as privately as possible. We have both a dislike to matters which are sacred to us being turned into the gossip and foolish jest of the place. It is hateful, and yet I dare say some folk like it. We don't, however."

How persistently he would speak of "we" or "Ellie and I." And here was a dreadful misapprehension of Mrs. Musgrave's meaning. The man was talking as if she were discussing the arrangements for his marriage with her daughter, not how the possibility of such an event was to be kept out of sight altogether.

"But, Mr. Armour, you must not tell Mr. Musgrave that it is my wish: you must tell him as if it was your own, that there should be no public declaration until everything is *quite* settled. I am anxious not to say anything that might cause you the least pain, but you can understand that there are reasons—circumstances—which make me desire, very much desire, that for the present at least, my daughter's name and yours should not be spoken of together."

She was a little awkward, but he understood her, and the blood tingled in his cheeks.

"Whatever I do, Mrs. Musgrave," he replied manfully, "will be done for the reason that I want

to make her happy. You may command me to do anything with that object in view."

"No one could expect or wish more," she said with a gracious smile as she held out her hand. "We have precisely the same object in view, and that is enough to make us good friends. I tell you it will tend very much to Ellie's happiness if we can avoid fuss and gossip at present; I depend entirely upon your skill and judgment to protect us from them."

"I will do my best."

Mrs. Musgrave was delighted; her clever idea was so far a complete success.

"Thank you again, and so many times. I cannot tell you what a load you have taken off my mind. Ah, Mr. Armour, men can never understand the anxieties which beset a mother who has a due sense of her responsibility in fostering and guarding the happiness of a daughter."

He accompanied her to the carriage, and as she was driven away she gave him a more gracious bow than she had ever given him before.

Armour was delighted too; for it seemed that he had completely won the good graces of Ellie's mother by simply agreeing to do what he would have done in any case—try to avoid gossip! She was a singular woman.

CHAPTER III.

IN SAFE HANDS.

HE could not get into the humour of those figures again immediately after the departure of his unexpected visitor. He was to see Ellie that evening, and it would be such pleasant news for her that the fear which had oppressed them both of the difficulty they would have in dealing with her mother need no longer have a place in their thoughts.

Mrs. Musgrave was satisfied. She only proffered a reasonable request—amounting to no more than that before they shouted their joy from the housetops they should be assured of its constancy. What a laughing reel those figures danced; and how entirely their plain business purport was changed for the moment into that of symbols of mirth to the eyes of this confident lover. How unjust they had been to Mrs. Musgrave in their doubt of her readiness to sacrifice her own prejudices as soon as she should be convinced that in doing so she would be promoting her daughter's welfare.

He felt disposed to throw aside these papers and run away at once with the good news to Ellie. But that would never do; he could not afford to shirk the unpleasant task he had before him. They would find time somehow to talk it all over in the evening.

So he made another effort to pursue with clear vision the intricacies of those important figures, and to decipher the proofs of past and prospective success or failure which lurk in every balance-sheet, although visible only to the eyes of the initiated. Somehow the items which had been suggestive of possible disasters did not appear to be half so threatening now as they did before Mrs. Musgrave called.

The result of his labour was not satisfactory, and he was glad at length to pass the papers into the hands of his cashier.

"It will take me a couple of days to make a thorough examination," he said. "I don't like the look of some of the items."

"There are a lot of them that do not please me," said Mr. Oswald, taking a pinch of snuff after elaborate preparations with his snuff-box and silk handkerchief.

He was a white-haired man of sixty, thin, sharp-featured and solemn. He had been cashier

for the last thirty years to each successive tenant of the Thorniehowe Paper Mills. As one after the other had failed he had retired, only to take his place again as if he were an immovable part of the building itself. He had suffered a kind of stolid distress at each bankruptcy, and the one hope of his life now was to die whilst the mill was in full work and his master solvent. He believed that his hope was to be realised.

Armour went homeward by the Green. He had not for weeks experienced such a sense of peace as he did that afternoon; he was even indifferent to the east wind.

The aspect of two subjects of troublous thought had materially changed for the better. In the first place he was now able to see the way to overcome the dreaded opposition of Ellie's mother more rapidly than he had hoped. In the second place, he knew that Thorburn was under the care of trustworthy hands; and that had comforted Grannie as well as afforded another proof of the Fiscal's friendship—for it was he who had found him.

He came to the house on the Saturday night, and was pleased although surprised to find Armour just returned from Kirkcudbright.

The latter could not help observing that the

Fiscal looked pale and fatigued. There was the same curious expression on his face as on the night when he arrived late at Torthorl, where Armour had been awaiting him to seek his aid in discovering Thorburn.

"I have found him," he said, "but he is not well. He got his head hurt, and may die."

The voice was low, steady, and cold as he gave this information.

"Let me gang to him this minute," said Grannie calmly, as she rose to her feet.

"No, Mrs. Armour, you cannot go yet. There is as much to fear from the state of his mind as from that of his body—probably more: he so dreads being found by any of us that the doctor bids me say he is convinced that the shock of seeing you, or Armour, or myself would be instantly fatal."

"Puir bairn, puir bairn, to turn that way against his best frien's," murmured Grannie resignedly, as if she were speaking of a hopelessly refractory child.

"Now, I want you to trust me with the management of him for a few days."

"He canna be in better hands since he winna let us do anything for him," said Grannie. "It's something to ken he's in safe keeping."

Ellie had asked him to trust her father, and Armour simply added to Grannie's words—

"We will act in every way as you may direct us, Mr. Musgrave. Perhaps afterwards, when he recovers and hears of your kindness to him at this time, he may be able to tell you himself that he is grateful."

The Fiscal went on as if he had not heard the latter speech.

"I have done what I could for his comfort at present, and I hope to-morrow to get him removed to more suitable quarters than those he has been hiding in until now. I shall see that he wants for nothing. Daily reports will be brought to us of his progress, and as soon as it can be brought about, with as little danger to him as may be, you will be allowed to see him. But make your mind easy regarding him, Mrs. Armour. Nothing more can be done for him."

That was all the information he had to give; but the relief of knowing that the man was still alive and under proper care was enough.

Armour knew Campbell's farm, and thought it a good resting place for Thorburn. As it was rest that was chiefly required for him, and as the place was of his own choosing, there could be no doubt that the course pointed out by their friend was the right one, namely, to leave him for the

present to his own whims, care being taken that he should not lack any of the comforts essential to his recovery. Since arrangements with that view had been made, the kindest thing they could do for him was to remain quiet.

The only reference the Fiscal made to Kirkcudbright was to express his satisfaction that Armour had come home at the moment when he was able to give him news of the fugitive. He did not mention Ellie or Mrs. Musgrave. This Armour attributed to his fatigue, and did not thrust the subject upon him. On the following days brief messages were brought for Grannie's comfort, to the effect that all was going well and there was no additional cause for uneasiness.

Grannie was satisfied, and Armour could not be otherwise. He made no attempt to analyse his own feelings, but he knew that what feeling he had was still for the man Thorburn, not for the parent.

He did not like that subject, but it forced its way into his mind at intervals. And always he seemed to see as in a faintly remembered dream the shadowy form of a woman. He never could see the form distinctly, but there were two sad pitiful eyes shining clearly upon him through the white mist as if pleading that he should think

of her tenderly. And he did give gentle and kindly thoughts to that mother he had never known whose story, whatever might be the rights of it, must have been a sorrowful one. Sometimes, looking in Ellie's face, the shadow would flit across his mind, leaving a wondering question behind—was there any possible combination of circumstances which could make him doubt her truth! Could she by any ingenuity of blundering make him turn from her in mad rage and hate, as his father had turned from that sad woman in the mist?

The answer was passionately prompt—No—No—his whole nature cried out against the possibility of such a monstrous inversion of his love.

Then there came upon him a rush of tender memories, and he cried: "Do what she may, I shall always be grateful to her."

The sunshine which she made in his life was too pure, too bright ever too be darkened by any cloud from within themselves. Worries and troubles they were already experiencing, and there would be more to come no doubt, but they would be borne calmly on the Atlas shoulders of their love.

With Grannie he had held scarcely any conversation on the subject. The instinctive shrinking

from it which had kept him silent when he knew nothing, had become intensified by what he had learned from his father. He did not wish to hear more about that miserable past, unless it might be he could hear that his mother had been innocent, and that there had been some extenuating circumstances in his father's conduct.

This latter possibility had been suggested to him by the strange ravings of poor Miss Graham. She had said that she could take the curse off his shoulders; and vague as the words were, Armour timidly admitted to himself—timidly, because it seemed such folly to attach the slightest importance to them—that they set him thinking of how it might be that Thorburn was less guilty than any one believed him to be.

But he did not question Grannie. He knew that if there had been anything to clear his mother of blame she would have told it in spite of any prejudices she might have in her son's favour. But the most she had ever said was:

"Puir lass, he was aye ill to do wi', and she didna tak' the right way wi' him. Puir lass, she was sair fashed."

There was comfort in thinking that his mother had been much tried, and he did not wish to know more. And so he could answer with kindly

thoughts those appealing eyes which shone on him through the mist.

He believed that it was best not to inquire too curiously into the past, since he could do no more than he was doing to redeem it.

"I think it is not selfish fear which makes me wish to let these matters be," he said to Mr. Moffat. "At any rate I have put my motives on trial again and again, and believe that I am honest to myself."

"Aye, most folk think that—every rogue thinks it," rejoined the minister; "and it's a great blessing. We would be miserable creatures if it were not for our unconscious self-conceit. Vanity is in our blood, and just as the blood may be spoiled by an excess of adipose tissue, so it may be spoiled by adipose vanity. The most vain often think themselves the most modest in accordance with their own estimate."

"When we are really trying in our secret thoughts to be honest to ourselves, surely we may be."

"It's clean impossible to be perfectly honest even to one's self about one's self. With every possible desire to grasp Self and comprehend him, there is always a shadowy Ego prompting us to tell a lie about the other fellow. When we have

caught hold of this shadow the mere effort projects another shadowy Ego claiming honours for the endeavour and blinding us to our faults of judgment. And so we may go on without ever reaching the last atom of Self that we wish to find. The atomic theory in physics would be the equivalent of this in morals. That brings us back to the old saw which cuts so many Gordian knots—we must e'en do the best we can according to our lights."

He was doing the best according to his lights, and as with him muscle held nerve well in control he was not visited by any morbid nightmares of doubt and hesitation, although he would sometimes pause to question the wisdom of his course. So he waited in readiness for the moment when he might be called to action on Thorburn's account; and he trusted to the Fiscal for the call to be made at the first sign that he could be of use.

Meanwhile he could be happy thinking about Ellie, and rejoicing in the relief afforded by the visit of Mrs. Musgrave.

Grannie did not rejoice over that visit as he thought she ought to have done. He could not get her to see that what he had been requested to do was only what he wished to do—to avoid gossip; and to understand that there was an

immense deal gained in having arrived at a thorough understanding with Ellie's mother. That would enable him to speak freely to her about the future, and would in any case enable him to understand her and she him. They could not expect her to be pleased with the match at the first. Ellie and he had known that, and had been greatly troubled to discover how they were to act in regard to her. Even the Fiscal had been a little anxious on the subject, and now she came forward herself to relieve them of all trouble and to ask only a little consideration for her view of things. She was entitled to that, and he thought it was exceedingly kind of her to deal with him in this straightforward way.

"I daresay it's a' right," said Grannie, shaking her head and smiling at his enthusiasm; "and I hope it may be."

The minister called, expecting to find Armour in need of condolence, and was amazed to hear his report of Mrs. Musgrave's friendliness.

"You know that she does not want Ellie to marry you," said Mr. Moffat, much perplexed.

"Of course. I knew all along, and that is why I admire her frankness in coming straight to me and explaining the conditions which would enable her to set aside her prejudices. She only

wants to be sure of Ellie's happiness; and as I want to be sure of the same thing, I will do anything in reason that she may require."

"She is a curious woman," said the minister, thoughtfully. "Matthey is right, it's nonsense to seek her meaning. I must have misunderstood her, for my notion was that she would do anything rather than let you have her daughter."

Then when Armour was about to start for Torthorl, this note came from his future mother-in-law:—

"Dear Mr. Armour,

"I am obliged to ask you to postpone the visit you intended to pay us this evening. Family affairs render it most desirable for us to be alone.

"Remember, I quite look upon our conversation to-day as forming a compact between us for Ellie's happiness, and I count upon your kind assistance.

"Ever yours most faithfully,

"E. MUSGRAVE."

Armour was greatly puzzled and disappointed, but of course he obeyed.

CHAPTER IV.

ANOTHER TRIUMPH.

SUCH a thing had never been heard of before. Indeed, it used to be one of Mrs. Musgrave's principles of marital duty that she would never disturb her husband at his office except on a matter of life or death. And she had never done so.

But there was Mrs. Musgrave's carriage at the door of the Fiscal's office, and there was Mrs. Musgrave herself stepping out of it.

This was her second visit in one day to a place of business, and she marched in with an air of proprietorship in the whole establishment.

Although she had never before honoured the office with a visit, she was known to the clerks, and they looked as if they thought that a matter of life or death were involved in the event of her coming. One hastened to inform the Fiscal of the strange arrival, and another, advancing, timidly inquired if he might offer her a chair—he dare not go through the usual formula of saying with supercilious indifference—

"Have you an appointment? What is your business?"

There were six clerks in this outer office, two of them apprentices. The six were unanimous in treating ordinary visitors with that discourtesy which, by some mental twist, the underlings in office imagine enhances their own importance and upholds the greatness of their master. They were equally unanimous in subservience to an extraordinary visitor.

The second clerk had scarcely accomplished his feeble proffer of a chair and received the stately bow declining it, when the first returned, and Mrs. Musgrave was shown the way into her husband's private office.

The Fiscal also treated her as an extraordinary visitor. If she had been the Lord President of the Court of Session himself who had unexpectedly appeared in the office he could not have received her with more profound courtesy.

He rose from his place, took her hand and conducted her to a seat, bowed, and stood as if waiting for the command of some high dignitary. But she was used to his ways, and all this only made her feel nervous and irritable in the presence of the confidential clerk, who sat like a piece of the furniture.

"Praise undeserved is satire in disguise," was her feeling, and if she had only had the phrase handy she would have used it. As it was, she said sweetly—she was still full of the glory of her complete victory over Armour—

"You know that only a matter of the very gravest importance would have brought me here. I shall not detain you many minutes, but we must be alone, if you please."

"Adamson."

The confidential clerk glided silently out of the room, as a shadow moves away when the position of a lamp is changed.

"I trust you do not come to consult me in my professional capacity, madam," continued the Fiscal, maintaining the attitude and manner of one who is addressing some distinguished personage.

"I come to speak to you in your position as a father and a husband, and I beg of you to be serious," she said earnestly.

"The position is a very serious one," he replied gravely, but there was a glimmer of his wicked smile in the corners of the eyes indicative of his enjoyment of the surprise which her reception excited. "I heard that you had both reached home safely, or I might have thought

that something had befallen Ellie when I saw you here."

Mrs. Musgrave got up and laid her hand on his arm. There were tears in her eyes—real tears, for she was very much in earnest. He felt that they were real, and he became slightly uneasy.

"You know that something has happened to Ellie, and it is not too much to ask that my views may be considered in the matter. You cannot desire her happiness more than I do, and it is impossible for you to know her ways so well as I do—I who am constantly with her."

The Fiscal was not prepared for either the tears or the simple earnestness with which she spoke.

"You had better tell me at once what all this is to lead up to," he said good-naturedly.

"It leads to this, Richard—that you and I are almost separated because we seek to secure her future in different ways: you think it will be safest in Mr. Armour's keeping; I think it will be safest in Mr. Fenwick's. Can we not join hands as we ought to do in this matter, and try between us to find out what is best for her?"

"We ought to do so, and I will try," he said.

"But, you see, Armour has proposed and I have accepted him, subject to her approval."

"Mr. Fenwick has proposed and I have accepted him, subject to her approval. You may differ with me regarding him, but you cannot deny that he has family and position."

"Both very excellent things in their way, I am bound to admit; but they do not overcome the important fact that Ellie prefers Armour, and so do I."

"I do not intend to question your preference or your grounds for it—although I do not believe her preference to be so firmly established as yours. Let us take all reasonable measures to prevent her making a mistake—that cannot be more than it is right for me to desire."

"Of course not, guidwife," he said, resuming his customary easy manner; "but you puzzle me to make out what you want. They have my consent; you know the only conditions on which I will withdraw it—one of them must ask me."

"Perhaps they may both ask you; but, whether or not, there can be no harm in a little delay. Will you agree not to hasten the marriage?"

"I am not likely to do that."

"And not speak of it out of doors?"

"I am not likely to do that either."

"Then that is all I want. I do not believe this will ever be a match, and I am anxious that Ellie should not be talked about. Mr. Armour himself does not wish to have the subject talked about more than can be helped. He is indeed as anxious as myself that it should be kept quiet."

"Eh?"

Conviction inspires the feeblest declaration with a degree of force, and so Mrs. Musgrave's reference to Armour elicited that long-drawn, questioning exclamation. She had touched unwittingly a hidden spring of his thought, and for an instant the heavy eyebrows were lowered.

Could Armour suspect anything, and was he shying?

"Ho do you know what Armour wishes?"

"I have just come from him."

"And it is his wish that the engagement should not be spoken about?"

"He said so."

"Well, it is easy to gratify him and you too, for I had no intention of sending the bellman round with the news. It is better for other reasons that you are not aware of that we should all be silent regarding this matter for the present."

"I am glad, Richard, that we both see it in

the same light at last—I have been so miserable. You must speak to Ellie this evening, and try to convince her that we are all studying her happiness and nothing else.”

Mrs. Musgrave was a proud woman as she drove home that afternoon. She had made a triumphal progress, and laurels seemed to be sprouting all over her bonnet. To Ellie she did not speak a great deal, but she gave her the impression that something of vital importance had occurred.

“Mr. Armour will not be here this evening,” she said with much significance; “but your father will speak to you when he comes home. You need not be alarmed, Ellie. We are only thinking of your welfare.”

The well-meaning counsel—“don’t be alarmed,” generally produces the opposite effect to that intended, and it always suggests the presence of danger even when there is no suspicion of any impending.

Ellie could not help being alarmed and perplexed. To begin with, it was a disappointment not to be permitted to see Armour that evening, and there was no clear reason why he should be kept away. Then her mother’s conduct was so mysterious, and the intimation that her father was

to speak to her when he came home combined to suggest that something very unusual had happened.

And, above all, there was that announcement which from her earliest recollection had been always associated with disagreeable affairs—that was the announcement that something or other was being specially done “for her good.” Anything resembling that phrase used to frighten her in childhood, and this evening somehow she experienced the same feeling she remembered so well. She was frightened and did not know why.

She wearied for her father’s coming so that she might learn what it all meant; but, as things will happen contrariwise as if to distress the more those who are already troubled enough, he was unexpectedly detained until a late hour.

In her own room there was a cheerful fire, and for a little while she sat before it, a book in her hand which she did not open. She was seeing strange phantoms in the sparkling coal; and by-and-by, as she slowly undressed, those phantoms haunted her.

She had not been able to make anything of her mother’s strange ways that day; but now, piecing her fragmentary observations together, she found in them such bewildering indications of de-

terminated opposition to her lover, that she could see no way of pleasing her. Yet she was a kind mother and she wanted to please her, but——

"It's no use trying," sobbed Ellie, as if she abandoned hope.

For it seemed plain enough that the only way to please her mother was to sacrifice her love. Surely that was more than a parent ought to expect.

A hand touched her head softly.

"What are you so downcast for, Ellie?" said her father.

With a little hysterical cry of pleasure she sprang into his arms and clung to him, as one drowning clings to a rescuer. They remained so for a few moments. Then he:

"Come and sit down and let us see what all this coil is about."

He took an easy-chair by the fire, she drew a hassock close to him, clasped her hands over his knee, and looked up anxiously in his face, whilst he passed his hand gently over her head, and through the long fair hair which fell like a cape about her.

"You ought to have been fast asleep by this time, and not spoiling your face with greetin'. What do you mean by it?"

"Mamma——"

She stopped, and he completed the sentence.

"Has been worrying you and has kept Armour away. Ah, well, never heed; your mother means kindly, and may-be, it is better that he should not come here at present."

"But she wants me to give him up altogether, and I can never do that. You do not want me to do that?"

"No; and I hope there will be no need to think of it. But you have the hard lesson to learn like other folk, my lass, that the things we most want are often the very things we cannot have."

There was a note of hesitation in his voice which startled her.

"But you are not going to draw back, papa—you are satisfied with him!"

"Oo, aye, perfectly satisfied with him; but wonderful as it may sound to you and to your mother, it is possible that he might not be perfectly satisfied with me."

At this absurdity the smile came back to her face, and it was like the first flash of sunlight after a shower.

"I will be his surety on that score, so long

as you do not take me from him," she rejoined archly.

He held up his finger in jocose admonition.

"Never be caution for any man; the best may fail."

Although this was spoken in the old pleasant manner, she had a vague feeling that there was something more serious in it than she could understand or he cared to explain. But she became somewhat reassured as he continued, and explained to her how they were to be very secretive about her engagement as it would please the mother and do them no harm.

But as he was going away there was that note of hesitation.

"You see we never can tell what queer things may happen."

Her hands were now clasped round his neck, and she was looking earnestly in his face—he gazing down fondly into hers. Under the reassuring smile with which he regarded her there was apparent an expression of sorrow.

He kissed her as he said "Good night," and this was the second time since these troubles began that he had thus manifested his affection. Her distress had brought the underlying gentleness of his nature to the surface. As a rule he "couldna

be fashed wi' thae palavers"—but it was because he covered what was really shyness by a pretence of indifference.

Ellie was comforted, she was not going to abandon hope yet; but she was haunted by that strange look of sadness on her father's face.

CHAPTER V.

"A SENTENCE; COME, PREPARE."

AS the door of her room closed behind him the smile faded from his countenance altogether. Every step he took away from her door became heavier; and when he entered the library, his head was bowed, his shoulders bent; and there was an expression as of settled gloom upon his face.

Here as at his office there was an atmosphere of scrupulous order; it was a cold and uncomfortable atmosphere. Every straight-backed chair occupied its fixed place with a self-assertive air of rectitude; the clean grey and yellow backs of the law-books which lined the walls were like the keen faces of lawyers watching a case, the gold letterings being their glittering eyes. On the top of each bookcase and exactly in the centre

was a full-sized bust of some eminent judge or advocate.

As he moved slowly to the table and sat down, he was like a man taking his place at the bar for trial. His heavy brows were knit, and for some time he sat staring hard at an unopened letter which he had placed on the table before him. Then when he lifted his eyes, the lawyers and judges seemed to be looking down upon him frowning.

"Aye," he muttered, as if addressing them, "it would be hard for her to give him up. *Must* she do it? . . . My poor bairn."

There was a sound in the room as of a heavy sigh, and the gloom on his face seemed to deepen. With mechanical precision of movement, he opened the letter which he had placed on the desk, cutting the envelope with a paper-knife so that the large official seal was left unbroken. He held the letter in his hand without seeing a word of its contents, and speculated upon what they might be. He looked up again at those cold-faced judges and advocates and they were still frowning.

Then with lips closed tightly he read:

"The case you submit to me is rendered peculiar rather by your way of putting it than by anything I see in the case itself.

"You ask me to decide upon it as I should do 'in the ordinary course as Lord Advocate,' and at the same time to speak as one friend to another. Business and friendship never mix well; but I will see what can be done for you.

"You do not say whether or not the case is purely hypothetical; but the impression your letter gives me is that you have some poor fellow in in your mind's eye whom you want to help out of a difficulty. You must however, in advising him—and I am surprised to be obliged to give *you* this warning—be careful not to forget that what may be a crime according to moral law might be none at all in the eyes of the Court of Session.

"As I understand it from your statement, A. meets B. accidentally. There is an old grudge between them. A. frankly admits that he so thoroughly hates B. that he would feel no compunction whatever in murdering him. They quarrel. A. has a momentary impulse to throttle B., but instantly regains his wits, and simply flings him from him and runs away.

"B., however, has fallen upon a sharp instrument and is so injured that he dies from the effects.

"Supposing it could be proved that A. had

committed the assault *with intent* to murder, and the result—death—followed, although A. in the course of the assault altered his mind and wished to avoid the crime, it would be difficult for a jury to bring in any other verdict than guilty. Granting the intent and the result, it would be impossible for any one except the man himself to decide where the element of accident came in to clear the incident of crime.

"It would be a pretty point for an advocate.

"You tell me there were no witnesses whatever. In that case I do not see how you could bring any charge home to the man except on his own confession and the statement of the person assaulted. If B. denounced him you are bound to put the man on his trial.

"But the case is altogether a delicate one, and a most disagreeable one, if, as you say, A. is a man who has led a reputable life. I hope it is only hypothetical. If it is not you must give me a more detailed statement of all the circumstances involved in it."

The Fiscal leaned back on his chair and closed his eyes.

A mist gradually filled the room, and through the mist he saw a court of justice. There were the judges in their ermine and portentous wigs;

here were the rows of eager-faced advocates, and behind them a crowd of spectators. He himself was the panel on trial.

There was great sensation in the court; for the panel was a man who had been widely respected for his probity; who had long held a responsible legal position and who had been regarded by many who believed they knew him intimately as one of such calm and even-balanced temperament that he was above the common passions of ordinary natures. His judgment was so cool and clear that functionaries of high position had often said that he might have been one of the most distinguished judges of his time.

Yet here was this man now standing in the position of a common criminal—shown to be one subject to the commonest passions of uncultivated nature, whose outward bearing had been nothing more than a mask of exceptionally cunning manufacture.

This big strong man had assaulted and murdered a poor, weak, half-witted creature for an offence committed so many years ago that only themselves remembered it.

The whole crowd seemed to rise in horror at the crime, and a low murmur of execration filled the court.

The respect which he had received in the course of his career rendered his guilt the more shameful and unpardonable. The panel stood there so calm that, to the crowd, he seemed insensible to the horror of his position; but the Fiscal could see into his heart and could feel its agony. He knew that the man was looking through the mists of the court at the stricken child whose whole life was destroyed by his act. It was the spectacle of her misery which made the position terrible to him.

Then in his anguish he pleaded for himself.

"He has said nothing yet—I need not speak and condemn myself. Why should I speak and murder her as well as him? For it would kill her. Is it punishment for my guilt that is required? No sentence that the court can pronounce can inflict upon me the thousandth part of the torture I am enduring."

"Be silent, then," said the advocate who was at his elbow. "There is no one to accuse you except yourself. Without your own confession it would be impossible to convict you. Be silent—live—they will marry and be happy."

"Aye," said the principal judge looking down blackly, "they will be happy; they will have children; they will gather around them many friends, and one day the truth will become known

and their added shame will make your guilt the deeper. It will not be one crime you have committed, but many. Speak at once, and let the court decide the question—guilty or not guilty.”

He could not answer that, but the advocate spoke again—

“You know that you are not guilty. You are allowing the sentiment of the past to prey upon your mind and induce it to take a morbid view of the case. You know that if it were not so, and if it were another man who stood on his trial before you, you would at once acquit him. Come, take a plain practical view of the affair. Your meeting with the man was accidental; you avoided him for months; you did try to control your passion—the event was a pure accident. Think of Ellie—you can see that the dearest hopes of her life are grafted on the lover from whom your confession must separate her. Why should you bring this unnecessary misery upon her and upon her lover, too, because of this mischance between you and the man who has been a curse to everybody connected with him? He was in such a condition that he was not likely to live long, at any rate. Come, be practical Richard Musgrave, you whose judgment has never yet been

questioned in the case of other men, and acquit yourself."

Then there was a long silence, and the figures which surrounded him melted in the mist; but that of the frowning judge above him had not yet gone, and to him the culprit made answer.

"Aye, I would have acquitted another man. I cannot acquit myself. . . . I am guilty."

As that verdict was pronounced there fell a great silence on the place. The man's heart missed a beat, and that halt of the machinery of life, which was only a breath's space, seemed to represent a long lapse of time.

Then the strange, cold silence was succeeded by a loud murmuring of voices which rapidly swelled into the loud roaring of an angry sea that was rushing in upon him to overwhelm him and all that was his with its resistless fury.

Again there was a pause—such a pause as that before a mighty whirlwind swoops like a destroying angel over the earth. Then he seemed to be walking a long distance through the midst of ruin, his footsteps faltering, his heart heavy

with despair, and not a living creature to make a sign of comfort to him, or even of pity.

Out of that desolation voices spoke—and he knew that they were those of his advocate and the judge, although he could not see them now.

One said—

“Wake, man, wake out of this trance—the happiness of your child is more than life, is more than honour to you; you alone can mar her happiness. Be dumb, then, and let her be happy; you alone will suffer.”

But the other voice—the stern, unseen judge’s—called:

“Be dumb, and he will speak before he dies. He will denounce you to the people as his assassin, and the period of grace will have passed—even those who love you will be unable to pity you. Speak at once and save yourself from the disgrace of falsehood.”

The first voice, with a scornful laugh—

“Let him denounce you if he will! You and he alone on earth know the truth. Answer you that he is a liar. Appeal you to your past against his wasted life, and the people will scorn him as one who, with his dying breath, would have wrought evil. All that you have done will plead for you: all that he has done will condemn him.”

"And the curse that has marred his life will fall upon you—the curse of a lie," said the solemn voice of the judge.

The place cleared again.

The Fiscal arranged paper before him and took pen in hand. His brows were knit, and there was a stern resolve in his expression.

"I know that he will speak as soon as he has strength—may be it will be some satisfaction to him to denounce me. I will arrange everything for him. His people will be there, and I shall be ready to meet my fate."

Then he began to write with his usual calm deliberation of manner. His pen continued to move steadily over the paper until early morning.

When he finished, he placed two documents in separate official envelopes. The one was his statement regarding the accident at Campbell's farm. The other was his resignation of the office of Procurator Fiscal.

CHAPTER VI.

AT COCK CROW.

DOES anybody know how it is that the birds are never late in awakening of a morning, and how the cock never fails to crow at the turn of the night, whether there is light or darkness? Here was a dull grey mist which would have deceived anybody who did not look at a clock with the notion that it was still midnight: you could feel the cold damp atmosphere cling about you and the eyes discovered only vague dark lines which might be the branches of trees or the outlines of skeleton buildings. Yet here were the chanticleers of Campbell's farm proclaiming the morning as resolutely and resonantly as if they had telegraphic communication with the sun and knew that, however poor ordinary mortals might be deceived by the mist, it was their duty to sing out that he had risen and would presently appear.

A cart was standing near the byre; in it there was a cosy arrangement of straw and rags, such as country folk prepare when they are going out for a holiday. A cart with some bundles of

straw and rugs, and some half dozen merry lads and lasses going for a picnic is one of the most luxurious conveyances yet invented—granted the merry hearts. No one ever discovers that it jolts for lack of springs, the straw being an admirable substitute.

It was Wull Greer who brought the cart to the place. No one who knew him would have been surprised to find him out at that early hour, although the cart might have puzzled them. His early habits and the results of them were known to most of the cottars round about—and to the keepers and water bailies, too, although they had not been often able to catch him redhanded.

At present he made his way up to the old granary, and there he struck a light. His movements were cautious, but they were devoid of that sense of dread which affects the boldest when engaged on some work they do not wish to be detected in.

"I'm sayin' I hae the cart ready and the sooner we're awa the better," he said, advancing to the rough couch on which Thorburn lay.

"Aye," muttered the wounded man, "but what is the use of it? What does the man who dies care about the place? I can die here as well as anywhere else. What does it matter where?"

"Just that; but, you see, it might matter to me. There's thae confounded constables after me, and if they found me wi' a dead man they might do mair than fine me. Do you no see that? And you maun mind that you promised me you wouldna get me into ony harm."

"Aye, that's true, and if I can manage it you shall not be sorry for your kindness to me."

"Let me see that. Here are your breeks; if you canna put them on, I'll help you. . . . That's the way. Ods my life, I think you are a guid sowl yet, and I'll do what I can to help you. But you maun mind that I can do naething unless you are ready to do a' that you can for yoursel'."

"I want to do that, Greer," almost moaned the man.

"Aweel, just try it. Come awa wi' me. Our folk are ready for you, and they'll do ony mortal thing to please you. There's my sister Leezie to nurse you, and there's me to let you ken how things are gaun on at Thorniehowe—there's just naething that you want that will no be dune for you."

"Aye, you are a good friend."

"Then you should do your best to prevent a good frien' frae getting into mischief. I tell

you that Captain Brown has got word o' where you are, and he will be here the-day. I hae everything ready for you at hame, and Leezie is waitin' for us."

"I don't feel up to much. I don't feel able to make an effort, although I know the bother you may have on my account and wish to save you from it. Standing is not easy when a fellow's legs have forgotten the way . . . : . Now, Greer, if you wanted to put spunk into me to serve our turn you would give me a stiff glass of the Enemy."

"I was thinking about that mysel', and hae a drap here for you."

He drew from his breast pocket a lemonade bottle and Thorburn eagerly extended a trembling hand. He held it up against the light and saw that it was more than half full.

"It's a cold morning," he said shivering.

"It is that, but tak' a dram—there's naething like it for warmin' a body——"

"And damning a body," interrupted Thorburn grimly.

"Ou, that's just as you tak' it," continued Greer, insensible to the bitter earnestness with which Thorburn's words were spoken; he fancied they contained some joke hidden beyond his ken;

and he was also unconscious of the philosophy in his own comment. "We aye ca' it chlorodyne at hame, because a neebour loon cam' to the house ae night late, as fou as he could haud, wi' a bottle stickin' out o' his pouch. Mither speirt what was that, and the lad in a confushioned way says, 'Oh, it's Chlorodyne. I hae just come frae the doctor's.' We a' gied a scraich, and he made his way out o' the house as quick's he could, drappin' the bottle in his hurry—for ye ken he was courtin' Leezie. Sae my father takes up the bottle and took a waft, and says he—'Aye, that's real fine chlorodyne.' And since that time we hae aye gi'en it the name."

Wull Greer chuckled with much enjoyment of this simple joke. Thorburn stood all the time with the bottle in his hand, a stupid expression on his face, and shivering occasionally as if he still felt the cold intensely.

"I have made a toss up with myself, Greer, whilst you have been speaking. The head is I win, the tail I lose. The head is myself: the tail is this bottle. . . . All right, the bottle has it, give us the cup."

Greer handed him a dilapidated looking teacup with a diamond-shaped breach on the edge. Thorburn drank and smacked his lips.

"I am stronger now, man,—I am in the right spirit to give you a fine lecture on teetotalism. Here was I a poor helpless creature, not able to lift my head, and you just put a spark of the Enemy into me and up I get. But, losh, man, the fire burns only a wee while, and already I am dropping back. Give me your arm. We will manage as far as the cart at any rate."

As Greer helped him along he continued to speak.

"It's a notion I've had for a long while that Next Time is the biggest devil in the whole army of Hades. Everybody says Next Time I'll do this or that, and Next Time is eternally skulking in the corner, chuckling at the poor wretches who call for his help, and never coming to it unless he is caught by the ear and held fast by Now."

Greer lifted him into the cart and tucked the rugs round him. Then he mounted the front board himself, resting his feet on the right shaft, and drove gently away from the steading.

The road was a good one, and although the journey occupied some hours, Thorburn apparently experienced no inconvenience. At intervals he spoke, inquiring how long it might be till they reached their destination, or making some observ-

ation on the gradual clearing of the mist and the promise afforded of a fine day.

At length they came to a steep hill up which the horse toiled slowly. The road was made on the edge of a deep glen, the sides of which were green and grey with firs, whins and brambles, and boulders of rock: the latter had apparently halted in their headlong course from the hill-top towards the rushing stream below.

Greer drew rein, the horse panting with a sense of relief. On one side of the road was a thatched cottage with a patch of ground in front well stocked with cabbages, potatoes, gooseberry and currant bushes; on the other was a small meal-mill. This was the home of Greer's parents, where his father combined the occupation of miller and farmer in a small way. Although the mill had only two pairs of stones, as most of the farmers on the same estate were "thirled" to it—that is, the farmers were bound to send their grain to be ground there—the miller, Greer, made a comfortable living, and was accounted a thriving man. He had eleven children; three worked at home; the youngest son was studying in Glasgow for the kirk; another was a farmer in Canada, and six were out at service.

Nobody ever thought that the miller's dignity was in any way lessened by the fact that his

children were "out at service;" and there was nothing in it to call for special admiration either. It was simply the natural order of things. The bairns had to make their way in the world as he had done; they were set to healthy work as soon as they were fitted for it, and they took their lot cheerfully.

Wull had always been the most unmanageable of the family, and consequently had always obtained the most attention. He was the chief amongst his brothers and sisters; even his learned brother who was soon to be a minister had to play a secondary part at Dalwheattie Mill when Wull was at home.

Wull's unmanageableness was due to a distressing mixture of good and evil in his nature; he was one of those most troublesome of all characters who are "ower guid to ban and ower bad to bless."

When the cart stopped at Dalwheattie Mill Leezie was waiting for them, as her brother had said she would be. Thorburn was fatigued by the journey, leisurely as it had been made; he had not spoken during the last hour of it. He was scarcely able to do anything for himself now.

"Just put your arm ower my shouther," said Wull cheerfully, "an' I'll lift you in. Man, you're

no the weight o' a sookin' pig. . . . There, that's the way."

And he carried him into a cosy little room which, although known as the parlour of the cottage, had a box bed. A comfortable bed it was too, spread with fine homespun linen, fragrant with "apple-ringgy," indicating that it had just been taken from the drawers where all the best blankets and sheets were carefully hoarded, only to be used on such an occasion as the present in honour of a distinguished guest.

The furniture was plain, and comprised a small sofa and three chairs covered with black horsehair; a table covered with brown oilcloth; and a chest of drawers on which lay a huge family Bible that had been taken out in shilling parts, and then bound in dark morocco leather. On the mantelpiece were some china ornaments, and on the walls were a few small engravings, two coloured prints given away with the *Illustrated News* and sundry photographs of the family—those of the father and mother belonging to the smudgy glass species, and so faded that they demanded close inspection before they revealed their subjects.

It was a room which at once conveyed the impression that it was always on its best be-

haviour: the bare floor was so clean that the absence of carpet scarcely attracted attention.

Thorburn was too tired to take note of these things, or to question why such comfortable quarters were provided for him, or why so much trouble was taken on his account. Wull helped him into bed, and he breathed with a sense of relief and restfulness.

Wull did everything with never failing good humour, and his sister gave him cheerful assistance.

"I'm thinkin' he'll be pleased noo."

"Nae doubt," said Leezie, "for he was feart for naething but the difficulty o' getting him this length. The next thing he says is getting him to see the doctor, and I'll contrive that."

The *he* referred to was the Fiscal. Wull was acting under his directions: it was he who suggested the argument by which Thorburn was persuaded to quit the old granary: it was he who arranged with Miller Greer to take an invalid lodger, it was he who provided for all expenses.

One condition was imposed upon all who were taken into his confidence, namely, that Thorburn should never know who was looking after him, or hear his name mentioned.

Daily the Fiscal came for tidings of the

invalid's progress. He did not enter the house. Leezie always saw him coming and went to the door.

"What is he like to-day?" was the Fiscal's question.

"Just getting on fine," was Leezie's answer.

And then the Fiscal turned away relieved and make his report to Armour. There was no sign on his face of the quivering anxiety of his heart.

CHAPTER VII.

BY THE PLANTING.

THERE is no sensation more delightful than that which results from the consciousness of having got one's own way. Mrs. Musgrave was very happy. She had persuaded Armour, and, what was much more important, she had persuaded her husband, that it was really imperative to delay the arrangements for Ellie's marriage. Delay was everything in her opinion; because she was convinced that with a little time her daughter would feel the advantages of becoming Mrs. Fenwick,

the mistress of an ancestral home, and the representative of a "county family."

It had certainly been rather painful to bear the evident distress of Ellie, although she had behaved submissively enough. But all things considered, she had every reason to be satisfied with the result of her day's diplomatic exertions; and being sustained by the consciousness that she was doing her duty she went to bed with an easy mind.

Mrs. Musgrave, however, was not an early bird, and had no suspicion that her plans might be interfered with in consequence.

Armour was well contented with matters as they stood. He had come, as he believed, to a complete understanding with his future mother-in-law; and that he counted a great gain. At the expense of much self-sacrifice he had obeyed her behest, and had remained away from the house on the evening on which he had expected to see Ellie. But the request did not apply to the following morning; and, knowing Ellie's habit of generally accompanying her father part of the way towards his office, he was out betimes and waiting by the planting in the expectation of meeting her.

Presently he saw them come forth from the

side gate of Torthorl, and he advanced joyously towards them.

Think of a beautiful landscape, dull under mist which is suddenly cleared away by the sun: think of the heavy drops of dew in an instant transformed into diamonds by the light suddenly flashed upon them—that was Ellie's face when she saw her lover.

She drew her arm from her father's and almost ran towards him.

The father noted this, and although his pace had been slow before, it became slower now as he purposely hung back. Presently he found something the matter with one of the young trees which compelled him to stop. But his inspection was brief; he decided that there was nothing particular the matter with the plant, and he might leave it to the care of nature. So he could go on.

"I am rather in a hurry this morning," he said as he approached the two, before their hands which had clasped in greeting were parted. There was something unusually grave in his voice and manner, which was rendered the more marked by the attempt to assume his jocose smile. "And I dare say you young folk will no be very sorry. . . . I hope you don't mean to try to make me

believe that you are. . . . That's right. I aye keep in mind that two are company and a third party is always in the way. I'll see you later, Armour, probably."

Then he passed on with long, hurried steps.

Armour grasped her hand again, and would have kissed her, but that he was checked by the strange expression of anxiety with which she looked after her father.

"What is the matter with him?" she said as if speaking to herself, and yet turning to Armour.

"Only some case which is worrying him," was the gleeful reply; "some vagabond has escaped his clutches, and he is annoyed about it. Never you heed, he will get hold of the vagabond soon, and then he'll be as merry as ever."

"No," said Ellie slowly and thoughtfully; "it is something about us that is troubling him. I cannot make out what it is, but he said to me last night that—"

She was puzzled [how to explain the strange words which haunted her; but she felt that having gone so far she must complete the sentence in order to satisfy Armour. So she went on hesitatingly,

"He said that perhaps it would be as well that you did not come here at present."

She felt awkward in saying this, but she was astounded by the manner in which it was received. Armour for an instant looked abashed; then he laughed.

"I know what is the matter," he cried confidently.

"Tell me," was her eager exclamation.

"The grey mare," he replied with great solemnity.

"What!"

"The grey mare," he repeated, trying to look more solemn than before, and holding up his hand with the forefinger extended as if about to deliver some admonition. "Now I am going to look into the future, and what do you think I see there?"

"I don't know," she answered, half amused and still perplexed about her father.

"I see a man they call John Armour, with a grey pow and a portly person, who is supposed to be a man who has a will of his own—that is outside his house. Then I see inside the house a bonnie, gentle-looking lady they call Ellie Armour, who is supposed to be so sweet that she has no will of her own. But I see that same

John Armour a perfect slave to her wishes, just because she is so sweet and so dear to him. Do you understand yet?"

"Not quite."

"Well, the whole matter is this: your father wants to please your mother, and he wants to please you too. At this minute he does not see how he is to manage it, because it is her wish that you should not marry me. But he does not know that your mother and I have entered into a solemn league and covenant, and we are perfectly agreed upon all its conditions."

"My mother and you agreed!" exclaimed Ellie bewildered.

"Yes, and the conditions are perfectly fair. They involve everything that I desire—your happiness."

"Did she say so?"

"Of course she did, and I mean to help her with all my might to that end. What she wants is fair and reasonable, and it comes to nothing more than this, that you yourself are to decide whether you are to find happiness with me or no."

"But I have decided, and she says I'm wrong."

"No, no; she only says that your present conviction may be a mistake, and that you must

have time to make quite sure that it is not so. I say grant the time—do you think it will make any difference?”

His face was beaming with confidence; he was smiling with the satisfaction of one who knows he is granting a concession which costs him nothing. Her face brightened, too, and the disengaged hand was placed on his arm.

“No time can make any difference in me,” she said simply.

And then—

Well, they were by the planting; there was a calm sough among the trees, and there were no eyes of people or houses upon them.

They walked to and fro along the side of the planting; and they were happy although they did not speak very much. Perhaps they were happiest in those moments of perfect silence when they walked side by side full of the sense of each other's presence, and so, quite content. These are the moments in which love is fullest of sweet imaginings: the brain is active with tender thought, and the mental eye is full of pleasant visions of a long and happy future.

What a pity these are only moments!

But fortunately in these moments there is concentrated the life of years; and it is worth

living to realise them. So Armour and Ellie would have thought, had they not been too blessed in the present to reflect about it at all. One enjoys the perfume of a rose without pausing to speculate upon its source. Love grants brief spans of perfect happiness, and the lovers do not stay to inquire too curiously into the reason why.

He was there: that was enough for her. She was there: that was enough for him. Father and mother and all the world were forgotten by them: they only knew that they were together, and believed that they might be thus walking through life with the bright morning sun upon them and the pleasant aroma of the green trees about them.

What did they care about the calculations of Mrs. Musgrave, founded upon her narrow experience of ordinary men and women? Maybe she was right so far as concerned *them*. Undoubtedly she meant well, and was actuated by a pure motive. But they did not belong to the ordinary category. They were lovers, and all the commonplace ordinances of the world must yield to their love.

Listen to those birds: did ever birds sing so sweetly! Look at those trees: how fresh and fragrant they were. Look at this green field stretch-

ing down to the river; and look at the cows leisurely browsing or stolidly gazing at nothing. Was there ever a field so green—were there ever cows so contented—was there ever water gleamed so beautifully as the field and the cows and the river which appeared through the halo of their love?

They were very happy that morning, and the memory of it was a treasure to them afterwards.

CHAPTER VIII.

SOMEBODY WRONG.

NOTWITHSTANDING Armour's assurance that her mother was willing enough to consent to their union under conditions which she thought desirable, and the natural repugnance of the girl to think that she could have attempted to deceive him, Ellie was not satisfied. This was, however, due more to her uneasiness about the conduct of her father than to any serious doubt as to her mother's truth. Indeed, her thoughts were almost entirely occupied with the former.

What *was* the matter with him? At first he had been so pleasant in talking about the engagement; and now he seemed to hesitate so much; and he had even said that it might be better that Armour should not come to her at present.

What was his meaning?—no unkindliness to herself or to Armour: of that she felt sure. It was something about them both which was vexing him: of that she also felt sure. But what was it? It could not be the scandal about Armour's father; for he had known everything, and had said that no man was responsible for the conduct of his parents. He had given his consent at once to their union; he had raised no objection, except that they would have some difficulty in overcoming the dislike of her mother to the match. Then had come this curious change. He seemed to be distressed, and half desirous that the marriage should not take place.

Two things he had said to her which remained vividly in her memory. The first was spoken before the visit to Kirkcudbright—"Whatever happens, Ellie, I'll do the best I can for you." There was comfort in that assurance; it was a charm against all fear. But the second—spoken on the night when she was made so unhappy by her mother's determined opposition to Armour—

inspired the misgivings which were only soothed by a constant use of the charm. "You see," he had said, "we never can tell what queer things may happen;" and that commonplace phrase, combined with the sadness of his expression, still haunted her.

In her growing anxiety she spoke to her mother.

"Do you think papa is quite well, just now?" she said thoughtfully.

Mrs. Musgrave was astounded at the idea of the Fiscal ever being anything but well. In all her experience of him, he had never been afflicted by any ailment more serious than a slight cold; and she could not imagine him on the sick list.

"He has not given me the least hint of there being anything the matter with him," she replied. "Why do you ask?"

"Because I have been watching him, and I see that he looks sad and weary. His voice is so weak, and he moves about in such a slow way that I am sure he is not well."

The mother hesitated for a minute; she was not in any degree alarmed about her husband, and she saw here an opportunity of influencing her child to the advantage of her own designs.

"It will be some of those tiresome things in

his office that are affecting him. Perhaps also his anxiety about you may have something to do with his present state."

"That is just what I would like to understand, mamma," cried the girl eagerly. "Why should he be anxious on my account?"

"I think you should be able to understand without asking me," rejoined Mrs. Musgrave significantly.

Ellie understood her mother, and particularly wished to avoid any further discussion about Armour at present. So with a touch of impatience in her voice, she only said—

"I do not think it can be that. He is satisfied."

Then Mrs. Musgrave looked unhappy. She did not like to feel the reproach that was conveyed by her daughter's tone and look.

"Now, Ellie, what else could it be?" she exclaimed partly pleading and a little irritable. "You know quite well that although he may be worried by his office affairs, he is never sad about them. He sees that we are not pleased with each other; and he knows that there is nothing unreasonable in my desire that you should not involve yourself too far in this hasty engagement with Mr. Armour.

He is satisfied that I am right—so is Mr. Armour, and so would anybody be who understood the circumstances. But you are obstinate, and your father, who, I believe, really cares more for you than he does for me, is depressed in consequence. I am sure, Ellie, if you would try to think of it calmly, you would admit that I am right.

There was such a blending in the statements of what Ellie knew to be fact with what was only supposition that she was much more deeply impressed by them than her mother could have expected. Here was such a wild suggestion that her father might have been persuaded to take her mother's view of the case. Was it possible that he was sad because he did not like to tell her so? Besides, it was true that Armour, who was as deeply interested in the matter as herself, had assured her that there was nothing unreasonable in what her mother required.

Then was it possible that she had been all this time playing the part of a disobedient child and causing both father and mother unnecessary trouble?

"I would like to do whatever you want, mamma, . . . I do wish to please you."

"I knew that, Ellie, or I could never have borne half the worry this affair has caused me,"

cried the delighted mother. "I knew that you would soon come to see that my only desire was to do what seemed to me best for you."

"I never doubted that."

Then she kissed her mother and went out, leaving the good lady full of joy, for everything was coming about just as she had foreseen it would, and her daughter would yet be mistress of Cluden Peel. It was certainly unfortunate that Fenwick had no title; but he was young, he was clever, he belonged to an ancient family, and he might win some distinction for himself yet. So with childish glee she continued to build her house of cards.

Ellie went down by the terraces which overlooked the river. She wanted somebody with clear vision to help her to make out what she ought to do; and she was thinking about Grannie when she heard steps behind her.

She had chosen this walk because she was least likely to be interrupted by anyone; and now here was Fenwick at her elbow.

"You had just gone out when I called, and your mother told me which way you had gone," he said with his jaunty air, and without the remotest suspicion that his presence could be otherwise than agreeable.

"I would rather you had not come, Mr. Fenwick," she said awkwardly.

He halted, bowed, and looked as if he intended to wheel about right face and march away.

"I am sorry to hear that, Miss Musgrave; but perhaps you may consent to endure my society for a few minutes when I tell you that I came to say goodbye."

That did alter the case, and she exclaimed with an air of very frank but what he considered very ungracious relief:

"Oh, you are going away!"

He smiled with a comically malicious anticipation of her disappointment.

"Yes, but only for a few weeks; and my going depends a little upon you."

"Upon me! I do not understand how any of your movements can be influenced by anything I may do."

"Oh, but they can be very greatly influenced. You will permit me to explain, will you not?"

She had turned towards the house, knowing that there she could most easily escape from him. Her cheeks were tingling and she felt altogether uncomfortable.

"I will take your silence for consent," he said, again at ease and confident; "and tell you all about it. A wonderful thing has occurred—I have decided upon doing something!"

"Indeed!"

This, with an expression which would have convinced anyone but Fenwick that whilst she congratulated him on this noble resolution, she cordially wished he had chosen some other friend to be the hearer of the wonderful news.

"Yes, I have decided to go into Parliament, and I have also decided to make a hit there—some how—if it would please you."

He laid emphasis on the last words, but she affected not to observe it.

"I wish you every success—no one can do so more sincerely."

"Thank you: to have your good wishes is something. You know that we are not millionaires, but my father thinks we can afford to stand an election or two with the highly commendable object of getting me started on a useful career in which my energy, et cetera, will find scope for development. The sudden retirement of old Balfour, the member for Gartburn, gives me an immediate opening. The borough is not a large

one, and I am going to try my fortune at once. I begin the campaign to-morrow."

"That is very prompt," she said, trying to show some interest in his project, and hoping that in his enthusiasm he would forget the other matter at which he had hinted.

"Prompt's the word. We must let no grass grow under our feet, and I don't think we have done it yet. Balfour's retirement was made known yesterday; we decided last night; my address was ready this morning; it will be printed in all the local papers to-morrow; and I will be on the spot to stump the place, to spout beautiful platitudes about land laws, game laws, hypothec, and poor laws. I have one grand card to play, which will go straight to the heart of every true Briton! (You see I am getting into the style already). Would you like to know what that particularly grand card is?"

"If it is not a secret."

"Secret—it will be known through the length and breadth of the land in twenty-four hours."

"It must be a very bright idea."

"The brightest possible for helping a man into parliament. Are you getting impatient? Well, here it is. I mean to show every man how he can live without paying taxes, rent, or debts of

any kind! . . . There, is not that a magnificent idea? It is the realisation of a Utopian state, in which every man is to be as good as another. But you do not seem to be deeply impressed with the Napoleonic grandeur of my notion?"

"I do not understand how it is to be carried out," she said, laughing at his burlesque.

"The understanding is not of the slightest consequence," was his reply as he too laughed merrily. "It is a catching idea, and that is enough. But what I want to understand very much is, will you be greatly pleased if I win the day?"

"Of course we shall be pleased."

"Aye, but what I want to know is, will it give you any particular satisfaction to learn that I, rather than any other friend of yours, is returned at the head of the poll for Gartburn? . . . I think if I could take that knowledge with me, there would be no doubt of the result. Shall I have it?"

In Fenwick's wooings boldness had always been a stronger characteristic than tenderness; but now, touched with a real passion, his words, his manner, his expression, and even the form of his features seemed to obtain a mysterious refinement. For a few minutes he received no reply, and he watched her downcast face eagerly. He saw that

the expression was very serious, but there was no indication of emotion.

Presently she turned her clear, frank eyes full upon his face, and said quietly:

"I have told you, Mr. Fenwick, that none of your friends will be more pleased than I shall be if you are successful, and none will sympathise more if you fail. But that is all. Now I am going to ask you to prove your friendship for me."

The calm kindness with which this was spoken added to the feeling of disappointment with which Fenwick heard it, for it increased his admiration of the woman. What a splendid creature she was!

"Well, if that is all, I must be content with it for the present," he said cheerfully; "and you know that you have only to tell me in what I can prove my friendship."

"By accepting the answer I have given you now as the only answer I can ever give you, and so sparing me the pain of repeating it."

"That is too much to ask," he said impulsively. "I can never give up the hope of winning you until I know that you have given yourself to some one else."

"Then you do not wish to be my friend?"

"You know I am your friend, and will be always."

"In that case you can only prove it by granting the favour I ask without conditions."

Then she bowed and went into the house. She did not know that Fenwick was somewhat justified in his persistence by the assurances he had received from her mother that all was going in his favour.

"A fellow might do anything with such a woman for his wife," was Fenwick's mental exclamation, "and I know women too well to give up the chase yet."

The refinement with which his sense of real love had endowed him for a little while, had already disappeared.

CHAPTER IX.

BAD NEWS.

WHEN the Fiscal arrived at his office he despatched Adamson in search of Captain Brown, and then proceeded methodically to examine the correspondence which lay on his desk. This was

probably the last time he would have it to do; for the end was near.

The chief constable came promptly. The Fiscal handed him a piece of paper.

"That is where the man Thorburn is lying. I think you should be there to-morrow forenoon at eleven o'clock. I believe he will have something to say to you. I expect him to point out the man who caused his injury."

"Very good. Do you go with me?"

"I shall be there at the same hour; but as I am not able to fix the time at which I shall start you had better not trouble to call for me."

"I suppose you have got full information now about the case?"

"Yes, but I would like you to hear what the man says himself. I daresay you think it queer that I should take so much interest in this case. You will understand why to-morrow."

Captain Brown's sallow face did not display a shadow of curiosity, but his keen eyes were gazing steadily at the Fiscal.

"I was puzzled to make out why you were so eager at first and then so suddenly stopped."

"My interest did not cease. As I explained to you I had found him, and for the time there was no necessity for you to make further inquiry.

However, to-morrow everything will be explained. I have news for you."

"Another case?"

"No, not that. The news is only that you will soon have a new Fiscal. I have resigned."

"Tired of work?"

The question was put without any intonation of surprise.

"Not exactly. It would have pleased me very well to have gone on for some years longer; but an event which occurred recently has made me think it incumbent upon me to resign."

"Sorry to hear it. Who will get the appointment?"

"There's no saying; but if it had been in my power to recommend any one I should have given Adamson my best word. He knows the whole routine of the work. Put in a word for him if you can."

"I will."

The chief constable retired, much occupied with speculations as to the probable cause of Musgrave's resignation.

At noon the Fiscal's horse was brought to the door of the office, its owner mounted and rode to Campbell's farm. There he gave some instructions to Wull Greer and obtained for him leave

of absence in order to have him ready for probable emergencies.

Next he rode to Thorniehowe and found Armour at home. His arrival was not a surprise now as his first two or three visits had been, although this one was made earlier than usual.

But the tidings he brought did give them a surprise. One of Grannie's first questions had always been:

"When are we to see him noo?"

"Not yet," had hitherto been the invariable answer.

This time, however, the answer was, "to-morrow."

"Then he's better," said Grannie quietly, although she was full of joy. "The Lord be thanked. And when did he come to himsel'—when did he ask to see us?"

"He has not asked to see you," replied the Fiscal slowly; "he does not yet know that you are going to him. I have taken upon myself the responsibility of making the appointment, because I think it important that you should see him now."

The light which had suddenly flashed in Grannie's face passed away as quickly as it had come.

"Then he's deein'" Then, standing erect, her sightless eyes turned towards Musgrave, whilst Armour took her hand in his; her lips moved, but they did not hear the words "Thy will be dune."

"The case is not yet hopeless," said the Fiscal gently; "he may mend."

"Ay, he'll mend," she said in a low, steady voice, and both men understood the significance of the words. After a pause she went on: "What for can we no gang to him enoo?"

"Because it is necessary first to persuade him to let you come. He is still under the impression that none of us know where he is hiding."

"Sae be it," she said softly. "I would fain see him, but I'll no do onything that might hasten his hour. I ken that he's no keepin' us awa frae him out o' ill will to us, but because he thinks it best for us."

Then she bowed her head and quitted the room, Armour going with her. But he stopped at the door of her room; he knew that she wished to be alone, and he knew why.

He returned quickly to the Fiscal, who was standing in precisely the same attitude as when he left him.

"Is it death?" inquired Armour. "You can tell me the worst."

"I fear it is; but the doctor does not think it will be immediate—he even thinks recovery possible. I hope he may recover."

This was spoken with so much earnestness that Armour could not help looking at him inquiringly.

"You will not be surprised that I am anxious about him when you learn that should he die you may find it necessary to break off your engagement with Ellie."

"What!" ejaculated Armour, scarcely able to believe his ears.

The words were repeated coldly enough, but with an undercurrent of agitation.

"Oh, impossible!" said the lover.

"Any kind of misfortune is possible," rejoined the Fiscal bitterly. "Let us hope he may recover."

"But what is it you mean?" was the bewildered question. "Nothing can ever make me break off my engagement unless she tells me what I know she cannot."

"We shall see to-morrow," was the strange reply.

"If it were not that I know you are incapable

of jesting at such a time as this, I should regard your suggestion as one of the biggest jokes you have ever made. As it is, I wish you would explain."

"I ought not to have spoken. I would like you to have the explanation from his lips, not mine. But as——"

The Fiscal stopped; he had been about to say, "As I have startled you by my remark, I must tell you the whole circumstances myself. I am not so thoroughly the master of my tongue lately as I used to be, and without my leave it uttered the thought which has been uppermost in my mind for some time."

But he could not do it then; and it was best to leave the explanation to come to-morrow, as he had arranged. So he said:

"I must ask you, Armour, not to worry yourself by my careless words. Rest assured of this, I am more resolved than ever that nothing but your wish or hers shall keep you two apart."

"In that case, I can forget your curious suspicion that it was possible for me to wish for any change. But you did startle me; for only this morning we were talking about the possibility of your having changed your mind."

"Then it is well that the opportunity occurred

for me to repeat my assurance of the only conditions on which I will retract my consent."

Armour was satisfied; at any other time he would have laughed loudly at that wildest of all wild imaginings—the possibility of his wishing to give up Ellie. He was happy in smiling at it now; still, when the Fiscal had gone away, he had uncomfortable thoughts about what was to happen to-morrow.

It seemed somehow as if a shadow had fallen across the path which had been so bright that morning.

CHAPTER X.

ON THE EDGE OF THE STORM.

A BLITHE man was Wull Greer with his unexpected holiday before him and an unexpected pound note in his pouch. The first was still long, and although there was a brisk north-east wind blowing, it was bracing, and the sun was shining. The second was short, for it was soon changed; and Wull's experience had taught him that although a note was a respectable sum whilst it remained whole, it was just like a nest of new

fledged sparrows as soon as it was transformed into small coin, and each piece took to itself wings, "fleeing awa in unkenned airts," with incomprehensible and mysterious velocity.

"There's nae accounting for it," was his resigned answer, whenever his father had attempted to remonstrate with him on his extravagance; "there maun hae been bad tailorin' about my pouches."

"It's nae use speakin'," would be the father's melancholy comment; "ye are a sair hair in my neck an' I maun just thole."

"Just that," Wull would say cheerfully, "an' be thankfu' it's nae waur. You ken there was—"

And then Wull would give a list of ne'er-do-weels who had been transported or hanged, and felt quite satisfied that his father ought to be comparatively proud of him. It is one of the anomalies of human nature and a reproach to its judgment that the ne'er-do-weels awaken so much pity that they always cause more pain than they suffer.

Wull had to pass through Thorniehowe because he had to go to Deacon Simpson's for some delicacies which had been ordered for the invalid at Dalwheattie Mill. So he had a chat

with Eppie Lawson, who was always about the door seeing that the bairns who were too young for school did not fall into mischief; or on the way to or from the well with her water stoups swung out from her sides by means of a large hoop.

Then he encountered Tawtie Pate, and had something to say to him which involved a dram. Gow, the smith, came into the inn whilst they were at it, and that involved another dram. Next came the Soutar, and that meant one more dram, whilst the return treats had to be counted in between.

But they all kept their heads steadily, considering, so that even then Wull did not betray the secret about Thorburn.

"I'm just gaun to see a frien' that's no weel at hame," was the explanation he gave of his holiday.

At last he got his parcel from the deacon's shop, and strode out sturdily to make up for lost time. He was proud of his position as an assistant of the Fiscal; the novelty of being on the side of law was still fresh upon him.

"You are clever in the up-tak', Greer, and I expect you to manage this business as well as you have done the rest" the Fiscal had said; "and if

you do—well, there's a small farm somewhere that might suit you."

And, consequently, Wull was determined to manage the business entrusted to him. Knowing what prospects he had before him, he was merry at the spectacle of his father's 'dismay at his appearance at that time of day.

"Back again!" exclaimed the miller disconsolately, as he thought that this wastral son was once more thrown on his hands.

"Never you heed, father, it's a' right this time. You'll maybe proud o' me yet."

"Proud!—whan?"

"Sooner than you think. You just never heed me the-noo, and in a while you'll no be sorry. I'm come to see my frien', and to bring some things he needed."

So Wull went into the cottage. He saw Leezie first. She had been baking, scouring, and milking—she was now washing—and in the intervals she had been nursing Thorburn.

"He's just the same as far as I can tell," she said in answer to her brother; "at a minute you would think there was naething wrang wi' him, an' the next you would think he was at the last gasp. The doctor thinks he's a wee better."

"Was he speiring for onybody?"

"No, but Maister Musgrave was speiring for you, and says he is coming back to hear what you hae done."

"I'll be ready for him."

Wull went into the little room, where Thorburn lay staring at the shelf near the ceiling and at the foot of his bed which formed a kind of general receptacle for Sunday bonnets and other articles not frequently required.

At first he did not appear to notice Wull's arrival in spite of the latter's repeated inquiry.

"Hoo do you find yoursel' the-day, Mr. Thorburn?"

By-and-by, however, he turned his face slowly towards him, and eyed him absently.

"I suppose you think you are going to keep me here for ever," he said huskily; "but that is not so. I mean to get out of your clutches soon."

"I dare say you will," answered Greer, consolingly, "but it will depend on yoursel' whether you walk out o' our clutches or are carried out o' them."

Intelligence dawned on the invalid's face and he spoke more clearly.

"That's you, Greer?"

"Just me."

"I am glad to see you. How many years is it since I saw you last!"

"That depends on how many hours you count to a year. I would say that it was only a wee while since I brought you here."

The man was silent, looking dreamily at his visitor's face, and then:

"Ah, you count time by the hours of the clock. You do not know what suffering is."

"I hae had my head smashed wi' a horse; my hand nearly ta'en off wi' a chaff-cutter; my arm broken in twa places wi' a tum'le frae a cart, and a heap o' things forbye."

"I wish I could swop with you," said Thorburn, a grim humour on his ghastly face. "Man, if you only knew what it was to lie here for, say two of your hours, with all these ghosts passing and repassing before you; every one looking at you with sad, weary, reproachful face, filling your soul with remorse and dread that you had done them wrong — then you would know what it was to be living through ages of torture."

"I never saw ony ghosts," said Wull simply, but moving uneasily a pace back from the bed.

"Then break your bones and be happy; you do not know what pain is yet."

He laughed faintly but contemptuously at the commonplace woes which his friend had recounted.

"Do you want to skear me awa' frae you?" said Wull, a little hurt by what seemed to be the ingratitude of the man he had aided at the cost of so much trouble to himself before he knew what rewards his action was to bring him.

"No, no, I don't want to skear you, man," replied Thorburn in a hopeless tone as he moved his head from side to side. "I was only telling you how the time goes with me. How long must I wait now?"

There was a kind of despairing impatience in the tone of that question.

"There's nae sayin'—maybe it'll be a long while yet; an', if I was you, I'd try to find out some kind o' thochts that wouldna fash ye sae muckle."

"That's true, Greer. You are becoming as good as a parson."

"Havers!" exclaimed Wull, as if he did not like the satire.

"You may complete the character by telling me what I ought to think about."

Wull was "quick in the uptak'," as the Fiscal

had said, and he saw a good opportunity here for effecting his purpose.

"Maybe I can do that too, if you would listen wi' reason."

"I'll try."

"Weel then, you said that you would like to do me a good turn."

"Aye, but I cannot."

"Onyway you needna do me an ill turn if it's in your power to prevent it."

"How's that?"

"Weel, it's just this, an' it's the chief reason for my bein' here the-day. You see, as long as you was likely to get on your ain feet soon it was a' right for me. But you're no like to do that; and by your ain way o' thinking you'll never do it. Noo, what'll happen to me?"

Thorburn was silent, and his faithful friend went on.

"You ken there's been a heap o' seekin' for you—an' though I dinna want to say onything to hurt you while you're down, I canna say that you seem to me to hae done the right thing by your friends, judgin' frae what I hae hard about them and ken about them."

"What do you want me to do?"

"I want you to let your folk come and see

you. I'll gie you my word that they'll no touch you, or try to tak' you awa' unless it be your ain pleasure."

Wull gave that assurance with the air of one who knows that his guarantee is enough.

"You have seen them."

"True enough, I hae seen ane o' them, an' I ken that they mean to do naething but what will please yourself. I ken mair—that your keepin' awa' frae them is like to prevent a marriage that was to hae come aff if you had bided at hame, and would come aff yet if you were just to let your folk ken where you are."

"I did not know that."

"Oh, but it's true, though I'm no gaun to tell you hoo I came to ken it. You see it's in your power to do me a good turn, and your folk tae."

Thorburn did not speak. He closed his eyes and remained quite still. At length:

"I have been thinking about that, Greer, but I doubt if it can do them any good to see me. I always made mischief amongst them, and it seems to me still that the best thing for them is never to hear another word about me."

"Ou, but you're clean wrang; you hae done them the worst mischief in rinnin' awa; and there's

nae sayin' what mischief you may dae to me if you hide frae them muckle langer."

There was a long pause, during which the invalid again closed his eyes.

"Very well, you can go to Thorniehowe and tell Mrs. Armour I would like to see her."

"I'll dae that, right gladly; and I'll fetch Maister Armour at the same time."

"Fetch anybody you like," said Thorburn wearily.

"I'll no fash you ony mair the-noo then, but you can lippen to me to dae everything needfu'."

Wull went out with a contented mind. He had accomplished the object of his mission with much more ease than he had expected. Of course he had no need to go to Thorniehowe, and when the Fiscal came again he had his answer ready for him.

So the night went by; it was one of the quietest Thorburn had experienced for some time. Wull Greer remained in the room with him throughout the night; but his assistance was scarcely required, and for the most part he was allowed to snore peacefully on the little sofa.

Thorburn slept fairly well, but he lay awake at intervals listening to the rising wind which was moaning through the glen; and then to

the heavy rain which began to beat violently against the little window.

"It's an evendown pour," said Wull, as he looked out in the early morning. "I haena seen rain like that for mony a lang day."

The cottage might have been a diving-bell at the bottom of rapidly moving water, and the view from its window would have represented what was visible outside. Dull grey water through which the trees on the other side of the road could not be seen. It had subdued the wind, and its own continuous splashing on the ground was the chief sound that reached their ears.

"It's a fine morning," said Thorburn, slightly raising his head.

"A what?" exclaimed Wull, turning quickly to stare at him.

"A fine morning, I say."

"You're no gaun wud again surely."

"Oh no, I'm better this morning than I have been since the night you picked me up. I begin to think that blood-letting did me good, for my head is so clear."

"Then I wouldna say that this is a fine mornin'."

Although he spoke lightly, Wull was not al-

together at his ease: he had been imbued with the superstition that during the few hours which immediately precede death, the intellect is supernaturally keen.

"That is just why I say it; because in this weather the folk will not come, and I shall be glad of a respite."

"I'm doubtin' you're mista'en; they'll be here. This rain is ower heavy to keep on lang. I hear the wind beginning to rise doon there already."

"I want to get up then."

"That's clean ridic'lous on sic a day as this. You're far mair cosy in your bed."

"If the folk are coming I want to get up. I want to see them at my best, and so give Grannie the least fright that may be."

"Bide a wee then or I get you something warm."

As Wull had prognosticated, the rain had abated by breakfast-time, although it still fell heavily. It had made deep channels of the cart ruts on the steep red road, and the streams were rushing down angrily, gathering strength as they approached the foot of the hill, and uniting their forces into a considerable burn as they reached the level ground. There they swelled the ditches

to overflowing, and a couple of inches of water spread over the level road.

Whins and brambles and all low-lying bushes were beaten down, and the branches of the trees moved heavily in the wind. The burn in the bed of the glen had become a stormy river, dark and drumly, and with a few hours more of this rain would attain the dimensions of a spate. No glint of sunlight relieved the dull, sulky face of nature.

Through it all came Grannie and Armour to keep the appointment that the Fiscal had made for them. They were in a gig, and a strong horse took them along the road at a good pace in spite of the elements. But they had to go at a walking pace when they came to the brae leading up to Dalwheattie Mill. The streamlets rushing down washed the horse's feet and the wheels as the slow progress was made upward.

Armour remembered with a kind of shudder that he had attended a country funeral on such a day as this; and it seemed to him as if this was only one stage in another funeral. Grannie had spoken little to him since they started. She answered his inquiries about her "haps" and general comfort in monosyllables; and on the brae they did not speak at all.

Leezie was at the door and led Grannie into

the kitchen, whilst Armour went with the miller to the stable to attend to the horse. The miller would gladly have done this service himself, for he knew Armour as a thriving manufacturer and was proud to see him at his place.

When they returned to the cottage, Grannie had been relieved from her wet outer garments and was asking Leezie about the strange guest. At the same time Wull came from the parlour.

"He scarcely thocht you'd come, but you can gang in noo. He is sitting in the chair."

The fact that he was able to be out of bed gave them some relief; and Armour led Grannie quietly into the little room.

The man was sitting bolt upright with his back towards the bed. His white face resembled that of a corpse with its bandages. He stretched out his long thin hand which Armour took and pressed kindly; then without speaking placed it in Grannie's.

"I'm glad to see you again, Jock," was what she said in her calm, quiet voice, but her fingers trembled a little as they passed gently over his face and head. "Are you better noo?"

A pause; then:

"Aye, I am better now."

And then there was another long pause. He

had been always sickly looking, but Armour was glad Grannie could not see him as he appeared now. In his own breast the intensity of pity for the man's misfortunes was forging those tender links between them which should have been made there long ago. There was something, too, in Thorburn's expression which suggested that he understood what was going on in his son's mind.

"I was feared that we would find you past speaking to us," Grannie went on; "I'm rael glad you haena got that length yet."

"I will speak better presently."

"Dinna waste your breath. I hae nae doubt that if we can get you safe hame you'll hae mony a blithe day afore you yet. . . . Ye are gaun to come hame, of course."

He looked towards Armour, who promptly answered:

"You know that I have always wished it."

"You do not know how my presence will interfere with you."

"I say, come whether or not."

For an instant a grim smile flitted across Thorburn's face.

"You do not know the curse you have brought upon yourself in pursuing me—what ruin

you seek in taking me home. Your life would have been happier if you had never seen me again."

"That's just a' your ain fancies," interposed Grannie. "You canna do ony harm to us, and we are thankfu' to Mr. Musgrave——"

"Musgrave!"

"Aye, it was him that found you out and that's been daein' everything for you."

The man's face had been anxious, but not displeased or ill-humoured. Now it became dull and gloomy as the day.

The Fiscal was riding slowly up the steep brae through the rain, his head instinctively bowed low against it. He was insensible to wind and rain, although they seemed to crush him down on his saddle as they crushed the plants down to the ground.

There were voices in his ears speaking louder than the elements.

"That dying man will charge you with murder, and murder was in your thoughts at the time. You are going to your own execution."

"Then let it come," was the answer, "I am ready."

CHAPTER XI.

AN AULD FRIEN'.

WULL GREER entered the room in his pawkie way, and with a sly grin on his face as if he had some pleasing news to communicate and was proud to be the bearer of it.

The oppressive dulness of the day, and the uncomfortable mental atmosphere in the room did not harmonise with Wull's smile or cheery voice, but he was blissfully ignorant of that.

"Can you mind o' ony auld frien' that might want to see you though you maybe dinna care to see him, Mr. Thorburn?" he asked cautiously.

"No," answered Thorburn, looking straight at him, and conscious of an uneasy thrill passing through his frame.

"Weel, there's ane come that says he wants to see you, sae that you may settle in your ain way some matters that nobody but yoursel' can settle."

Thorburn understood, and yet mechanically put the question:

"Who is it?"

"'Deed, it's just Mr. Musgrave himsel'"—he had been warned not to say Fiscal.

Thorburn remained silent for a moment and quite still, his eyes fixed on Wull's face, but not seeing him. Then, in a clear, thin voice:

"Bid him come."

Grannie's head was bent forward eagerly to catch every sound which might indicate how Thorburn regarded the prospect of this meeting with the man whose mere name had formerly excited and agitated him so much. Armour was watching his face anxiously, but he could not make anything out of that curious smile with which he looked towards the door.

The Fiscal entered, and close behind him was Captain Brown, who remained in the doorway whilst the former advanced only two paces across the threshold.

The two old friends gazed at each other in silence: the Fiscal was grave and calm, Thorburn quiet, but with a slight nervous movement of the lips at intervals. Both were mentally acting over again the scene in the shed of Campbell's farm.

"I did not wish to come until your friends were with you," said the Fiscal at length. "And I hope you will not be much disturbed by my visit."

"I am pleased to see you—old friends should always be pleased to meet."

The answer was so unexpected that the Fiscal's eyes quickened with suspicion that the words conveyed a sneer. But he found no corroboration in the speaker's face.

"Yes, old friends should be glad to meet again."

"Especially when one of them is so near the end of his journey that both have the satisfaction of knowing that they cannot meet often."

"I do not think there could be much pleasure in the meeting which arose from such a sentiment as that. But if it affords you satisfaction to feel that we cannot meet often, I hope you may find it rather in our mutual forbearance than because the end of either of us is so near."

Thorburn made a slight movement of his hand as if pointing to himself, and there was a ghastly smile for an instant on his face.

"That's kind of you, but you hope in vain. It is mockery to think that such a wreck as this can hold together long. Therefore I say again I am pleased to see you."

The Fiscal was perplexed by this strange opening of their interview. He had expected Thorburn to denounce him at once; and, instead,

he was received in this grotesque humour, behind which, however, there lurked something suggesting to his suspicious eyes that Thorburn was laying some trap for him. He knew the man; he would cajole him into some affectation of renewed friendship and then would suddenly turn upon him and make charge. He determined to give him the opportunity as quickly as possible; and yet even at that moment, when he looked at Armour and thought of Ellie, his heart sickened with hesitation.

"My reason for disturbing you," he said quietly, "is the important one that Captain Brown, who is here with me, is anxious to bring to justice the person who assaulted you, and who will be guilty of something very like murder should you die from the effects of your wounds. We wish to have the whole story from your own lips."

The calm, steady voice and the upright bearing of the speaker betrayed no more than an official interest in the case.

"Yes, we would like to know from yourself how it all happened," said the chief constable in his brisk way; and with a feeling of intense relief that his own wild suspicions were as ridiculous as he had all along wished to believe them to be.

Thorburn paid no heed to him: his eyes were half-closed, peering at the Fiscal. Then he turned

to Armour; looked back at the Fiscal and divined something of his meaning. That curious smile which the son had noted before returned to his face.

"What would happen, supposing I did tell you that somebody had done this—I mean what would happen to him?"

"If you could identify him," said Captain Brown, as the Fiscal did not speak, "I would catch him and the Fiscal would send him for trial."

"Ah, then he would be sent to prison. He would be disgraced—all who belonged to him would be shamed. If he were a proud man the degradation of being cast into a common jail would make him writhe with pain. If he had wife and children they would suffer torture on his account . . . and could my word do all that?"

There was a kind of fiendish pleasure in the voice and look of the man as he calculated all the pangs that he might make his enemy suffer. He seemed to be gloating over them as if they afforded compensation for his own pains.

Not a muscle of the Fiscal's face was disturbed.

Brown had seen many queer characters in

the course of his business, but he had never before seen one who took positive pleasure in his own injuries because of the penalties to be paid for them by the aggressor. He did not like the spectacle; but he again answered:

"You can send him to prison; but the rest will depend upon who the man and his people are. I know plenty of wives and children who rather enjoy having the father locked up."

"And he could be locked up whilst I am still alive—to-day, for instance—now, perhaps," Thorburn went on as if following the train of his own thoughts without reference of the presence of any one. "I would hear about it—I might even read the paragraphs in the newspapers; see his name drawn through the maudlin puddle of sentimental reporters? . . . That would be satisfaction, but I cannot have it."

His expression had changed before he uttered the last words and become sad and serious.

"I am glad of that," said Grannie, "for I wouldna like you at this time especially to take pleasure in ither folk's sorrow. You need mercy yoursel', Jock, and you should hae nane but merciful thoughts for ithers."

"You have not told us anything about the affair yet," said Brown sharply.

Then, Thorburn very quietly and deliberately:

"There is nothing to tell. It was a pure accident. I fell upon the harrow and cut myself. I hid because I did not wish to trouble my people any longer with my useless life. You have found me—I think it is a pity; but I am content because I know that I can do no further harm to anyone. I have no more to say. A few weeks will square my account with this world."

His head sank on his breast as if he were tired. Brown, however, wished for more information.

"But I understood you to say that you had been attacked by some one."

"I say it was a pure accident; there is only one person to blame."

"Well, who is that?"

"Myself."

The Fiscal's lips were closed tightly and he had not once removed his eyes from Thorburn's face. He had grown paler as he listened to the repeated assertion that there was no one to blame. He had not winced in the least degree whilst Thorburn was apparently gloating over the shame which was about to fall upon him. He had ex-

pected that and he had thought of it all himself. So he had been prepared.

But when he found this man from whom he had expected nothing but the worst that his spite could accomplish actually concealing his share of that night's work, he was moved. When he found him resolutely repeating the story as he had given it to Wull Greer in the first instance, he was moved with respect for this attempt to make some atonement for the past.

He understood that this was not done because Thorburn had any greater liking for him now than before; but for the sake of their children. Should he then break this generous silence and mar their happiness? It was hard to accept mercy from one for whom he had such contempt. In his pride he would have stepped forward with the declaration:

"He is like himself still. He does not speak the whole truth. It was I who flung him down in my fury."

But he restrained himself. The matter was not in his hands.

"I think we are taxing his strength too far, Brown," he said, and his voice was somewhat hoarse. "We need not wait any longer."

"Very well. He ought to know better than us, and it evidently has been merely an accident."

As they were going out Thorburn raised his head and called:

"Musgrave."

The Fiscal turned back but did not speak.

"I don't think we are likely to meet again—I dare say we won't care to meet. But for auld lang syne let us shake hands once more."

The Fiscal gave him his hand without any sign of hesitation.

"Good-bye, my auld frien'," he said quietly. "I want you to carry this in your mind, Musgrave—that whatever may have passed between us I look upon you now as a good friend. Tell your daughter that I hope she may have a long and happy life with her guid man."

And he looked significantly at Armour.

"I will give your message."

The Fiscal left the room feeling that he had made a bargain with Thorburn.

CHAPTER XII.

SUSPENSE.

IT was settled that Thorburn should remain at Dalwheattie Mill until the doctor said he was strong enough to be removed to Thorniehowe. Whatever extra inconvenience this involved to the household of the miller was cheerfully accepted.

"Just dae what you think best," said the miller, good-naturedly.

"Od, I'm thinking, father, that if Mistress Armour bides wi' the man it 'll be easy enough," said Leezie, taking a plain common sense view of domestic necessities. "You see she's gaun to bide in the room wi' him, and though she's blind she's just a miracle o' a body when ance she kens whar things are. An' I'll mak' up the soffie intil as guid a bed for her as onybody could wish to lie on."

Grannie was grateful for the services of these good friends, and they were glad to do anything for the blind old woman whose earnest and devoted nature exercised so strong an influence

upon them that, although they did not know its meaning, any task seemed light if it pleased her.

Thorburn relapsed into his quiescent state as soon as that interview with the Fiscal was over. He had never been so obedient in his life before. Whatever Grannie said he was to do, he was ready to do. He submitted as if he had in truth become a child again, and gave loving response to the loving commands laid upon him.

He went back to bed, and after a few minutes' rest he drew a long breath—as one does after thinking out some sad problem and finding a satisfactory solution to it—and said calmly:

"I think it's all right now. The lad will have his lass and they will go on together hand in hand living happy ever after."

"What was you saying, Jock?" inquired Grannie, bending over the bed.

"I was only thinking about your laddie—for he is yours, not mine—John Armour, and amusing myself by anticipating in thought the future which I can never see."

"You are far ower gloomy. The Lord has his ain way o' doing things and there's nae use trying to do them for him. Maybe he means you to live a long while yet."

"I hope not. I got to the end of my tether

long ago, and I should not like to have it lengthened now."

"It's no for you to dictate."

"That's true—it's not for me to say I shall go this way when it is ordered I shall go that way. Why did Armour go away so soon? Was he angry with me?"

"What for should he be?"

"Because I am his father. . . . That's a pity for him."

"You are no to fash yoursel' about onything he does just now; because he is sair worried wi' things at the mill."

Thorburn remained quiet for a little while. Then:

"What can there be to worry him there? I think I know as much about it as he does himself. It was a sort of payment to him, I thought, to use all the knowledge I had gained in my various speculations in America in directing his affairs here. I pried into everything, and I know that he had sufficient contracts on hand to keep his business flourishing for a couple of years. The people he was dealing with are all safe. What is the matter then?"

The invalid's strength seemed to revive in his anxiety about his son's affairs.

"He does not tell me what the fash is until it's a' bye and settled. But I ken frae what he does say mair than he thinks. I'm doubtin' that he's anxious about the bank that has all his siller in hand and about some shipping company that he trusted a great lot to."

"I wish I could be with him," Thorburn groaned. "But his bank has passed through storms before and must be safe. The shipping company I warned him about in a humble way, for he did not then know who I was or how much I knew. The manager of the company I met in New York. He is a wild speculator who has no regard for anybody's interests but his own—and he does not even regard his own in the right way. . . . I told him that he would lose every penny he put into that business. But the bank is safe."

"I canna tell, but he's been very anxious for weeks past. Onyway he had to haste him back."

"I wish I could be with him," muttered Thorburn between his teeth, and with his eyes closed.

"I'm hoping that you will be soon if you'll no be thrawn, and let Dr. Johnstone see you and tell us what to do. He's our ain doctor, you ken, and wonderfully skilled."

"Have anybody you like to see me," said

Thorburn. "I never thought that I could wish to be on my feet again. However, I did mean to go to the kirk and market before I died."

That was said with a certain bitterness, as if he had been impelled to the intention, not by his own will, but by the desire to serve a purpose.

"I would be rael pleased if you would gang to the kirk," said Grannie, catching at the one point which appealed most to her notion of what was best for him. "And I'm sure there's naebody would be mair pleased to see you than Mr. Moffat."

"Well, I hope to give him that pleasure," was the reply in a cynical tone; "but in the meanwhile, I want to know what's going on at the mill."

"Oh, we'll get news o' that soon enough! But if it would please you, I think we could get Wull Greer to gang doon and speir at Johnnie."

"That's it—call him," was the eager comment.

Wull was close at hand, ready to perform any service that might be required of him, for besides his readiness to do anything in his power for Thorburn, he was eager to please the Fiscal.

"I want you to go to the paper-mill at Thorniehowe," said Thorburn calmly, "and say to the master that he will make me easy in

my mind if he will tell me how things are going—under his own hand.”

“I’ll do that,” said Wull cheerfully. “Is there onything I can fetch for you, mem?”

Grannie gave him a few instructions for the servants at Thorniehowe, and then Wull went into the kitchen to tell his sister Leezie that he was to be back in a few hours. Next he went over to the mill and procured a flour-sack. He stuck the one corner into the other, and placed it on his head in such a way that it formed a sort of hood with a sharp point sticking up like the termination of fool’s-cap. Then he lit his short clay pipe, and marched down the road indifferent to the drizzling rain.

When he arrived at the village he had, of course, a word to say to Gow, the smith, and to other cronies, and he did not even note the important fact that the rain had ceased, and the sun was shining through watery clouds.

As he passed the village well he gave the usual greetings to three women he saw there. Eppie Lawson was just dipping one of her stoups, and chattering all the time to her companions who were waiting with their stoups to get water. Curiously enough, the subject of their conversation was Thorburn. That was natural,

however, for Eppie had looked after his cottage, and one of her present companions was Babbie Howison, who had been his nurse during the last few days before he made his escape; and they were discussing the important question as to whether or not he was a lunatic.

"I ken mair than you can do about him," said Babbie, "and he was just as daft as a March hare—if no dafter."

"That's no true, Babbie Howison," said Eppie Lawson indignantly, "for he was just as quiet as a lamb, and aye ready to do onything for onybody. You hae nae notion hoo he would play wi' the bairns, an' what funny toys he would mak' for them out o' naething but his ain head. Was it no me that sent you to him, and it's clean nonsense for you to say that you ken him better than me?"

"It may be as you say; but I hae experience," retorted Babbie proudly, "and the man was daft, there's nae doubtin'; or he wouldna hae rin awa' frae a guid hame. He had everything that mortal crature could possibly wish for, an' he ran awa'. If that doesna prove that he was daft, I'm daft mysel'!"

"Some folk might think you was," said Mistress Lawson satirically, and flinging over her

body a hoop, which used, crinoline-fashion, to keep the stoups from interfering with the action of the legs, she lifted her stoups and marched away.

Wull Greer found Armour in his office, and delivered his message. He was told to wait outside for a little time, and he would receive the answer.

Armour turned to Mr. Oswald again and resumed with him the task of examining the papers he held in his hand and comparing the figures in them with those in the ledgers. The master was frowning and his lips were tightly closed—John Armour did not look well with that expression. The cashier was pale and nervous, frequently applying to his snuff-box for consolation to help him through with the horrible task in which he was engaged. The dream of his life was not to be realised after all. That was hard to bear, for it had seemed so near, so sure at last, that he had been perfectly happy until these accounts of the shipping company had come in, and with them the first rumours of the difficulties of the bank. The poor old man showed more agitation than his master.

When the last page was turned over and the last figures compared—the total amount of loss

estimated, Armour folded the papers neatly and laid them down on the desk.

"That's a bad business, Oswald," he said, and, although his tone was low, there was an undercurrent of anger in his voice.

"It's a very bad business, sir, and if it should turn out to be true that there's anything wrong with the bank, I'm thinking it will be worse."

"If that should be the case!—but it is impossible. However, we may as well look at the worst side of things at once. I have read somewhere that the really clever general studies what ought to be done in the event of defeat more carefully than what ought to be done in the event of success. If the bank goes wrong we shall have to shut up."

Mr. Oswald took another pinch of snuff: he would have liked to have given vent to a groan; but that would have been unbusinesslike. So he took his snuff and stared at his ledger as if it had something to do with this disaster which now threatened them.

"Shut up, sir?" he said as if the event were too dreadful to contemplate and certainly too much for him to be able to realise all at once, notwithstanding his experience in shutting up.

"There will be nothing else for it," replied

Armour, rising with forced calmness and taking a drink of water.

"Surely that might be prevented, Mr. Armour," pleaded the old man as if the business were his own and he was pleading for its life. "You have your new inventions in working order, and surely you could find some man of capital to help you over any temporary difficulty. I know what to do, sir; I know it has been done in concerns not worth a tenth part of yours, and I could name more than one firm that has won through to fortune by adopting the plan."

"What is it?"

"Take a partner, or turn the business into a company, limited. I'm sure that it would do fine."

"Do you mean that I should ask a man who has money to put it into my business because it is on the brink of bankruptcy?"

"No, no, you do not understand, or you put a wrong construction on what I'm saying. You ask him to put his money in only for his own profit and yours."

"That is a little doubtful," said Armour, smiling in spite of himself at the old man's eagerness.

"It's done every day; and if maybe whiles it

turns out bad, that is no fault of the man who enters into it, or of the man who asks him—always so be that he does it in an honest way.”

“I suppose I should be honest in the matter.”

“There is no doubt about it. That being the case, the man, whoever he may be, comes in with his eyes open—it’s his chance of getting a place in a business that promises him a fortune for a few thousands of investment, and I believe they mostly get the advantage out of the transaction.”

“And mostly lose every farthing they have if the venture is unfortunate.”

“But that could not be the way in this case,” urged Mr. Oswald, taking a double pinch of snuff in order to emphasize his faith in the soundness of the house. “Do you not see, here’s a good going business, only needing so much more capital to tide it over an unexpected difficulty and keep it going? Well, it’s a chance for somebody that has siller and maybe wants friends. Anyway, anything should be done, Mr. Armour, excepting shut up, for you have all those folk dependent on you.”

Armour took another look at the papers, then at the ledger—poor Oswald watching him eagerly all the time.

“If the bank happened to be all right,” he

said, so quietly that any one would have thought he was talking of somebody else's business, "it would have been a fair and honest bargain to offer to any one. But, as I have my doubts of the bank, it would not be fair to induce another person to come into the business. However, we need not talk about that. No one having any common sense would risk his money with me after examining these balance-sheets as we have done."

"There are plenty folk would be glad of the chance if things were effectively and perspicuously explained to them."

Armour laughed at the simplicity of the old man.

"The usual way when seeking a partner is to explain things most effectively—for yourself. However, there is doubtless something in what you say. We have a good many orders on hand; I know that we are producing a good article, and I have no doubt even if we do get into deep water for a while, we shall reach the land somehow. The idea of a partner is a practicable one, and I will think about it. Thank you, Oswald."

The old cashier was comforted—so much so that in his joy he nearly spilled the contents of his snuff-box. He believed that they could bear the losses of this shipping speculation, if these rumours

about the bank proved to be false; and if it proved to be true, there was still the visionary partner or company to help them through. Mr. Oswald was blessed with few ideas; consequently, when he did get hold of one he stuck fast to it, and it took complete possession of him. At present his whole mind was occupied with that one thought—where to obtain a suitable partner, whose capital would help the mill through its present difficulties.

A telegram was handed in. Armour read it, and quietly laid it before the cashier.

"The bank has suspended payment and shut its doors, but this can only be temporary."

Mr. Oswald became pallid, and unable even to take snuff. Armour wrote quietly to Grannie in answer to Thorburn:

"We are in a mess, as the bank has stopped payment, but it will be all right by-and-by—don't be frightened. I shall see you to-night or to-morrow.

"Your affectionate,

"J. A."

He did not want to write more because he was afraid of alarming Grannie, and he knew that he could not write more without doing that or telling a lie. And he objected to lies.

CHAPTER XIII.

A GREAT FAILURE.

ALTHOUGH he wrote so quietly, and tried to make the best of the worst to Grannie, Armour was perfectly conscious of all that this telegram implied, if true. It implied ruin; and that implied the indefinite postponement of his marriage, if not the absolute necessity to resign Ellie altogether.

That thought made the future a blank. Fortune might be regained. There was in him manful confidence which is not born of vanity, but of faith in honest work—assuring him that he would succeed again. He was sure of it; for he had always believed that there was work enough for everybody who was willing to work, without being too particular as to what was set before the hand to do. He had always found that what was wanted was real workers, not work.

But this meant delay: perhaps the weary waiting of years, and that would be unkind to her as well as torture to him.

Would she wait?

He had no doubt of that. She was too brave, too true a woman to change because his fortune had changed. But there was her mother who opposed the match from the beginning; she would not be content to wait, and her constant influence must wear out the resolution of the most determined of daughters.

Well, frankly he owned to himself, he had no right to insist upon Ellie waiting until he again stood in the position which should enable him to offer her a home, if not equal to Aladdin's palace, at least to that to which she had been accustomed. He could not, and he certainly would not blame her if she changed her mind sometime after hearing the news of his ruin.

And yet there was in his secret heart a blissful conviction that she would not change her mind—that she never could do so any more than himself, and that he would find her in the worst extremity his comforter and faithful lover.

As he expected, the news of his imminent failure spread like wildfire—as soon, in fact, as the suspension of the bank was known the fate of the Thorniehowe papermills was also declared.

"Aye," said Tawtie Pate, wagging his head wisely, "I thought there was a downcome afore him. He gaed up ower fast an' he's come doon

the same way. But I'm rael sorry for him. He was a fine chap, and ought to hae had better fortune."

"He was a wee upsettin', though," said Deacon Simpson, with a smirk of self-congratulation; "you never found me tryin' grand experiments in this way and that way, as if I was wiser than my father afore me. Na, na, I just followed in his shoon, and look at me noo—safe and sound."

"Ou, aye, sound enough," said Gow, the smith and satirist, dryly. "I dinna ken onybody like you, Deacon, for takin' care o' himsel'. It's just wonderful."

"Naething particularly wonderful about it," said the Deacon, accepting the praise as a compliment. "I do nae mair than every honest man should do. I never gang ayont my tether. Ambition's an awfu' thing. I might hae ta'en the mills mysel'!"

"Aye, you see what blessin's we find in ither folks' doonfa'," said Gow dryly.

And so the gossip went on, every one professing and most of them feeling sympathy with Armour in his misfortune. But there was another matter which supplied ample material for talk at the same time. That was the return at the head of the poll of Hugh Fenwick of Cluden Peel as

member of Parliament for Gartburn. Thus the man from whom everything had been expected had apparently made a failure, whilst the one from whom nothing had been expected had scored a distinct success.

There were to be great rejoicings at Cluden Peel in honour of the new M.P. There was to be a big dinner-party, and the Musgraves were, as a matter of course, amongst the guests invited. Proud as the mother and father might be of their son's newly acquired dignity, their enthusiasm could not surpass that of Mrs. Musgrave.

She had the best of all reasons for being enthusiastic; she felt that she had some right to a share in the victory, for had she not always declared that he was a genius? Had she not always predicted his future glory? And had she not always urged him on in his career of ambition? Nobody rejoices so much in the success of a man as the person who can say with a smile of satisfaction to himself, "He has to thank *me* for that; he couldn't have done it without me." As a rule, people who say this have had little to do with the victory; but, all the same, they sun themselves in the honours of the hero.

Mrs. Musgrave was in that position. If she

had been returned to Parliament herself she could not have been prouder; and although she was by no means a bad-hearted woman, her satisfaction was to a certain degree increased by the information which came to her about the same time of the misfortunes which had befallen the master of Thorniehowe mills.

She wrote a letter and a note. The letter was to Fenwick, expressing her enthusiastic congratulations, and her fond hope that she would live to see him Premier. She wrote the letters M.P. very large, as if by that means she could swell his dignity.

The note was to Armour; very polite, very kind, condoling with him in his adversity, and desiring that she should call upon her at once for a little private chat.

Armour answered the note in person immediately.

Mrs. Musgrave was astonished to find that although he looked a little paler than usual he was perfectly calm, and showed no signs of the absolute humiliation she imagined should be displayed by a person in his position. She looked sympathetic, however, and retained his hand for an instant in her own as she gazed anxiously in his face.

"You know why I have sent for you, Mr. Armour? This news—this dreadful news—you will excuse me, I am sure, for you are aware of the deep interest I *must* take in your affairs considering the relationship you wish to form with us. Is it true?"

Notwithstanding the kindness of her manner, there was something in it which made Armour feel uncomfortable. He could not explain it to himself, but it was the kind of feeling one has on discovering some petty meanness in another whom he is desirous to respect and like. It pained him, and he wished he had not seen it.

"It is quite true," he replied. "I have sustained some heavy losses, and the failure of the bank at this time may ruin me."

She was almost awed from her purpose by the singular calmness of the man. If he had prevaricated—if he had even attempted to make excuses, to smooth matters over, she would have had little or no compunction in what she was about to do. But his perfect honesty made her pause notwithstanding her fervour on Fenwick's account.

"But isn't it very dreadful, Mr. Armour?" she said with something like timidity.

"It is certainly very bad, Mrs. Musgrave," he answered with the deliberation of one who has looked the worst in the face and prepared himself to encounter it; "but it is only dreadful to me because it may still further delay my marriage with your daughter."

"Ah, you have thought of that," she cried, delighted to have got her cue. She could speak freely now.

"I have thought of it, and I concluded that you sent for me to speak about it."

"You are very good, Mr. Armour, and I see you remember the agreement we came to about Ellie's happiness."

He bowed, but made no reply. She continued, a little awkwardly:

"It was about that—that matter I wanted to speak to you, and I did not know exactly how to approach it; for of course I am most anxious to avoid giving you unnecessary pain. But thanks to you—you are so very frank and kind, Mr. Armour—I am able to tell you at once what I have been thinking."

"I am glad to have been able to help you. You may be sure I shall listen with respect to anything to have you say."

"You are so good!" (he did not relish the

repetition of this flattery) "I know that this great failure must be very hard upon you, taking away as it must do everything you have gained by such—such energy and industry. And at this time, too, when you have other troubles to occupy your mind."

"It *is* hard."

"It must be very hard indeed; but I hope—I do hope with all my heart—that you will be able to recover yourself in time."

"I have no doubt of it. With time I can regain everything."

"I shall be the first to rejoice when you have done. But in the meanwhile I think that you should consider the position of Ellie. Of course she will be deeply afflicted by your misfortune, and with her girlish ideas of life she will be ready to promise you anything. If you speak to her now I have no doubt she will be ready to pledge herself to wait for you as long as she lives, but. . . ."

The last word was pronounced with peculiar emphasis, and Mrs. Musgrave made a grand pause, regarding him with a faint smile of expectancy as if she would say, "You must complete the sentence."

"I know that we must wait," said Armour,

divining her meaning and yet unable to do as she wished.

Mrs. Musgrave saw that he knew what she meant, and was irritated with him for compelling her to explain in words.

"You told me that you thought only of her happiness," she said with some impatience, "and if I were in your position, having that desire—considering all the circumstances—I would see that I had but one course to pursue. Do you not understand?"

"I think your meaning is quite plain," he replied with the utmost calmness, although his heart was quivering. "You wish me to release Ellie from her engagement, and I can say nothing more than I have already said, that if she should wish to change her mind, the mere wish would be enough for me. I should certainly not try to persuade her to keep her promise."

The man was so stubborn, there was no doing with him at all. But she must not lose her temper; she must be quiet and reason the thing out with him; and so by an effort she used the most persuasive tone and words at her command.

"Yes, yes, Mr. Armour, I am convinced that you would in no way try to force her wishes. But you must remember that Ellie is not an or

dinary girl, and so long as you do not tell her deliberately that you leave her free, she will hold herself bound to you no matter what she may suffer. I ask you, is that fair?"

At another time Armour would have smiled at the question, he was so confident of Ellie's fidelity; at present he was too much distressed to smile at anything, and he answered gravely:

"If it is your wish that I should tell her so, I will do it; but she is quite aware of my views on this subject."

"Then I do wish you to tell her, and I also wish you to tell her father."

"That seems to be a little unnecessary."

"Unless you do so, you will not satisfy Ellie that you are in earnest."

"To satisfy you that I am in earnest I will give her father the assurance that I consider her quite free of any engagement to me."

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Armour—you have given me so much relief. I cannot tell you how this subject has weighed upon my mind. It has almost made me ill, although I was sure that you would be ready to do anything that ought to be done for her sake. I need not say that I expect you to make your statement as if it came entirely from yourself."

Armour was a little put out at this, for he felt that making the statement at all might suggest the possibility that he himself wished to draw back. There was, however, no doubt that it was right to leave Ellie quite free under the circumstances; and he had so little fear of the result that he accepted Mrs. Musgrave's condition without hesitation.

She rang the bell and summoned Ellie, and he was too glad to have the opportunity of speaking to her to have demurred to any conditions.

"Mr. Armour has something very particular to say to you, Ellie," said Mrs. Musgrave, as her daughter came into the room. "Goodbye, Mr. Armour, and I sincerely hope that you will soon overcome all your difficulties."

She shook hands and retired in her most stately manner. She had no misgivings about what she had done; she was perfectly satisfied that she had discharged the duties of a mother with admirable tact. She had been considerate to the man who was leading her child into a commonplace marriage, and she had cleared the way to her union with one who might be the future Premier of Great Britain. The most exemplary mother could not be expected to do more than that.

To be alone with her again, to feel her hand in his, to look into her clear eyes, and then to think what it was he had promised to do! He was about to tell this girl whose face was a bright reflector of her mind, revealing to him love and sympathy — he was about to tell her that he thought her capable of change! He was about to say in effect, "You are fond and faithful so long as we are in smooth water, but I cannot trust you on board when we get into the rough seas." What nonsense! He would not like to have her with him for her own sake when the ship was going down; but if she were, he knew that she would take his hand as quietly as she was doing now, and stand patiently beside him until the big waves closed over them both.

"My darling," he whispered, as he took her in his arms, feeling ashamed that he should have to say anything which might even suggest to her that he doubted how brave and true she was and would be always.

"Was that the important matter you had to speak to me about?" she asked, smiling softly as she rested a hand on each of his shoulders and looked anxiously into his face. "You are looking pale and wearied; but I am glad you have not lost heart."

"That has been lost and found again, Ellie. I am having a bad time in business affairs. I suppose that is why you find me showing signs of worry."

"It is true then what mamma told me—you have lost everything."

The voice and face were full of such sweet sympathy that a man might be content to lose a fortune for it.

"No, not quite everything . . . yet," he answered, and would have added, "I still have you;" but he was obliged to alter the phrase. "I think we can keep our feet and make up our losses in time. But as things stand we will have to be like other prudent young folk and put off our marriage until I have won back something."

"Very well," she said quietly, accepting his decision unquestioningly. If he had told her that the wedding day was fixed for next week she would have responded in the same way.

"Are you sorry?"

"I must be sorry for the cause of the delay, but the delay itself cannot matter much. You are not going away from Thorniehowe and we can be often together."

"Yes, but . . . in the meanwhile you

are to consider yourself free from any engagement to me."

She looked at him with wondering eyes. She did not mind his words, but his hesitation and unsteady voice suggested that they meant more than she could understand.

"How can I hold myself free, John, when I—am yours?"

"That is comfort and strength too," his heart bounded all over his trouble into joy. "But you know it may be a long time—a very long time, and I want you to understand—to believe—" here was the difficult part—"to believe that you are quite free and that I do not consider you bound by any promise you gave when circumstances were different. Do you see?"

"No, for the circumstances were never different to me. We can wait."

And he knew that she would wait no matter what might happen. He did not feel called upon to insist any further on her understanding that he absolved her from all pledges. Indeed without his formal renunciation of all claim upon her she might free herself at any time if she showed a preference for another. If she ceased to care for him all bonds were worthless. Not from vanity.

but from his entire faith in her truth he was unable to conceive that to be possible.

"Yes, we can wait," he said with a confident smile.

And they were as firmly bound to each other then, when he had set her free, as they had been before. They were perhaps more firmly bound to each other than before: for he had learned that she could not understand how she could be free whilst she loved him, and she had learned that it was only because she loved him that he could value their engagement at all.

Poor Mrs. Musgrave!—she was very proud of her diplomacy. She had actually succeeded in making Armour himself break off the match, and she had persuaded him that it was his duty to explain the necessity of the breach to the Fiscal. It was his duty: and she was honestly convinced that she was doing hers.

She was well-pleased, and she had another little arrangement in prospect which would complete her triumph. She would soon be able to speak of "my son—that promising young statesman, Hugh Fenwick, M.P. for Gartburn." It would be almost as satisfactory as to refer to the late Lord of Session; and the relationship to the two dignitaries would afford her joy for ever.

CHAPTER XIV.

A SLEEPING PARTNER.

ARMOUR'S visit to Dalwheattie Mill was of some consequence. He found Thorburn in such an excited state that it threatened to end in a fatal fit of nervous exhaustion. His presence soothed him at once, although he still remained eager and questioned him about every detail of the business misfortune.

Endeavouring to take his mind away from that subject Armour spoke about Miss Graham and told him of her longing to see him so that she might "take the curse off him," as she had said.

"Take the curse off," muttered Thorburn gloomily, "it's rather late in the day for that. But did she tell you how it was to be done?"

"No, she would not explain it to anybody but yourself; and I doubt if she will even tell you when you go to her; for she has lost all count of time and expects to see you as young as—as young as when you went away."

"Ah, that's a long time ago: But I can

probe her memory as no one else can. You must take me to her."

"As soon as the doctor says you may risk the journey we will go. But you see, at present you may not even go as far as Thorniehowe."

"I don't want to go there particularly, but I do want to see Miss Graham. She has some message for me; that's what she means. And if she has anything to say that can relieve me I should be a new man. You must take me there. You don't know what the weak frame can endure when the heart is in the work."

"I cannot very well get away for a day or two—"

"Yes, yes, I was forgetting, my poor lad. I will be patient. Send old Oswald to me; I want to speak to him. We were great friends whilst I was at the mill, for he soon found that I was as eager for its prosperity as himself, and I believe your failure would kill him."

"That would be a bad job, but I hope it will not happen."

"Then send him to me at once. I have something to say to him—something that may help you to weather the storm."

"What is it?"

"Better not ask. Let me see Oswald. I want him to do something."

"All right; I'll send him as soon as I get back. I daresay the outing will do him good."

Armour was glad to see how much these promises relieved his father, although he believed that the desire to see the old cashier was only the result of some whim born of his feverish condition.

"Do just as he tells you," said Grannie, as she parted with him at the door. "It will do him guid, an' it canna do you ony harm."

"I mean to do it, Grannie."

"That's right, Johnnie, and you'll hae your reward. He's far mair sensible than you would think."

Mr. Oswald went to Dalwheattie in his master's gig.

On the following morning, whilst Armour was engaged in the office in the bitter task of arranging in their order the numerous claims for immediate payment which were rushed upon him as soon as the news of his involvement with the bank and the shipping company became known, the Fiscal called to see him.

Armour could not help feeling that this was the cruellest blow of all, for of course Mr. Mus-

grave had come to announce that the engagement with his daughter was at an end.

With a sigh Armour passed the letters over to the cashier, who was curiously placid to-day, and went into the private room where the Fiscal was waiting.

"You have a stey brae to climb this time, Armour; have you got the stout heart for it?" was Mr. Musgrave's kindly salutation.

"I don't know. Sometimes I believe it is in me to get over it, sometimes it seems scarcely worth trying. Let me spare you the task of having to repeat what Mrs. Musgrave told me yesterday. I consider your daughter perfectly free from any engagement to me."

He turned for a moment and looked out at the window. He could not command his voice, and he was glad that he had been able to speak the words distinctly.

The Fiscal's eyebrows rose and fell as if he had been taken by surprise. It was not so much what had been said that astonished him as the utterly hopeless manner of saying it.

"Do you wish her to be free?"

"I wish her to be free?"

There was a pause, and the Fiscal was

frowning as he surveyed his young friend inquiringly.

"Do you wish to be free from her?"

"What is the use of asking that,—I have no choice. It will take years to regain even a part of what I have lost. I cannot bind her to wait all that time, or expect you to sanction such an indefinite engagement."

The Fiscal's countenance cleared a little.

"I think you are right; she should not be bound to wait, and as you desire it we will consider the engagement at an end."

Armour felt as if the last straw had been laid on the camel's back. But he had faith in Ellie still to keep him up.

"I thought you would wish it to be settled in this way."

"It is as you desire. That, however, was not the subject on which I came to speak to you. It was about your business. There is a friend of mine who wants to invest some capital in a good going concern, and it occurred to me that at this crisis you might be inclined to listen to his proposals."

Armour was amazed at the coincidence, but he was somewhat dull in the "uptak" at this moment, for his mind was full of Ellie. Her father

had taken the renunciation so calmly and dismissed it so briefly, that he felt for the first time as if a real barrier had been raised between him and the prize which had been so nearly won.

He wakened up however, and was pleased as well as grateful; for he saw that this proposal would enable him the sooner to claim her.

"It would be of much advantage to me just now to have some additional capital; but does your friend understand anything of the business, and who is he?"

"I am not at liberty to tell you anything about him. He desires to be in every respect a sleeping partner, and you must accept me as his responsible representative."

"Is not that a little unusual?"

"Not at all; you have simply to deal with me as if I were the man myself. I shall be answerable to my friend for everything that I may do on his account. He will trust me and I can trust you."

Armour sat down and leaned back on his chair, regarding the Fiscal with a puzzled expression; but he did not speak.

"Well, what do you think of it?" queried his friend.

"Oh, it is an excellent chance for me,

of course—but I am thinking about you, Mr. Musgrave.”

The latter smiled, amused by Armour’s bewilderment.

“And what about me, if it’s a fair question?”

“I was wondering how it is that you are always such a staunch friend to me. Whenever I was in a mess you have always been ready to help me out of it. How is that?”

The direct question was almost too much for the man. Armour was touching the raw flesh. The one sad, and dearest experience of Musgrave’s life had been his love for Armour’s mother. Everything else that he had done or hoped to do had been a matter of cool calculating common-sense. In that one passion the man’s strong nature had been loose: he loved the woman without reason; he loved her, because he loved her: he had no explanation for it. She had jilted him, and she had deceived him: and still he loved her, cherishing her memory as the most precious jewel he had found in all his life.

And her son asked him why he should be his friend.

Should he tell him? Would it be good for him to know? Would it be kindness or would it be cruelty to let him know the whole story?

He did not know exactly what to do; but there was a curious thought passing through him that in making this man understand the link that bound them, there would be something reaching her. So:

"I am going to tell you something that may pain you, Armour," he said, making a sudden movement forward and gripping him by the arm. It was the first sign of nervousness that the Fiscal had ever shown. But even as he spoke there came the hesitation again. "I don't know whether I should tell you or not—perhaps it is best you should understand me. . . . The thing is simple enough. . . ."

Simple as it was the Fiscal stopped and clenched his teeth as if he were swallowing something.

Armour was looking at him with an expression of curiosity and amazement. He had always regarded him as a man who had no feeling whatever. The Fiscal had been to him what he was to outsiders—a calm, clever man, who never allowed feeling to have anything to do with his work. He did know that Musgrave could be kind: and he had good reason to be grateful to him. But when he came to him in this strange way with a proposal which made the difference between

fortune and ruin, and with that curious tone and look, he could not help questioning himself and his friend—"Why was this?"

Simple the reason might be, but the man found it very hard to put it into words.

"The reason why I have tried to be your friend," he said coldly, "is that I have some remembrance of your mother."

"My mother?"

Armour started. Here was the opportunity to find the answer to all those questions which had troubled him so.

"Yes, and it is for her sake that I have been and am ready to do whatever is in my power to serve you."

Armour clasped his hands, leaning over the table, and bowed his head upon them. The great cry of joy that was in his heart he did not speak, but it was this—"Thank God—she was innocent."

There was no need for explanations to lead him to that conclusion. It was clear to him the moment Mr. Musgrave spoke; and the latter understood that it was so.

Then he arose, and advanced to the Fiscal, whose hand he grasped with that kind of fervour

which only comes when one feels deeply grateful. Still holding the hand, he looked straight into his eyes.

"I don't know what I am to say to you, Mr. Musgrave—you can't realise what I have suffered thinking about my mother. Of course it cannot be of any moment to me what she was as the world goes—but I have loved her memory, and it was horrible to me to hear that she could be the false woman my father told me about."

There he struggled with himself: he wanted to say something more, and he could not.

The Fiscal helped him out. They were still looking each other straight in the eyes, and laying a hand upon Armour's shoulder he said:

"It's not a nice thing to tell to a son, but you know so much already that the rest can be only pleasant to you. . . . It is queer, but even at this time of day, I find it difficult to speak about her quietly. There is not much in it to you or to anyone except myself. . . . Your mother and I were great friends—so great that I believed at one time our lives were to be spent together. Your father came between us—there was a slight quarrel—a separation—and we had to walk in different directions. She took her way—poor

lass—and found death. I took my way, which was one of indifference to all human nature. I married a woman who had all that was necessary to help me forward in my business. It was a business affair altogether, and we are both satisfied with the result. That's the whole story."

"But about my mother—I want you to tell me about her. Grannie has always been silent, and I have been coward enough to be afraid to ask. Now—after what you have said—I know that I may ask and not be afraid to listen."

The Fiscal looked at him steadily for an instant, and then motioned him to a chair.

"Sit down, and I will tell you."

There was a strange look in Armour's face. Could it be true that this man had no knowledge of the suffering he had caused? Could it be true that this man had been the cause of the act which had ruined his father's life, and remained silent about it all these years? No, it was impossible; he who had been so generous could not knowingly have done such a wrong.

"I am listening, Mr. Musgrave," he said quietly.

The Fiscal rested his elbows on the table and his cheeks on his knuckles.

"I have told you that it is a simple affair, although it has led to so much trouble. This was how it came about. Your father, Graham, and myself were close friends. Our pleasures were taken together, and for a time we worked together. During that time we were often at the house of your mother's father. Your mother and her sister, although only the daughters of a small farmer, had by their own intellect acquired a position higher than that of any woman in the district. We were three poor lads who had our own way to make in the world. Good luck made us acquainted with her father, and he was a man who liked to have young folk about him. In that way we had many merry gatherings at the farm."

Here the Fiscal stopped and drew a long breath, as if he wanted strength for what he had to say afterwards. He did not move his hands from his cheeks, or his eyes from Armour's face, but he tried to speak lightly, as if to glide over the tenderer parts of his story.

"Your mother was my favourite—as she was your father's—her sister was Graham's. . . I say again, think of what you feel for Ellie—all that I felt for her. But unfortunately I shrank from speaking to her, because I knew that I must ask her to wait so long for me. Your father, more

regardless of the ordinary affairs of life, spoke, and married her. . . . You must try to get over it, Armour—I didn't like him for taking away from me my prize. But I remained their friend, and only blame myself for not speaking out when I first discovered his foolish jealousy of Graham. There was of course this excuse for me that I was angry with him, and that at first I was not quite sure that he was making a mistake. I learned the truth unfortunately too late, and I was mean enough to stand back because . . . well, because I was angry with him and her for being such fools. Then came the worst part of all, the treachery to Graham and . . . I'd better not go on with that. All that I want you to understand is that your mother was an honest woman, and his folly killed her."

The Fiscal rose, walked to the window and back again, his hands behind his back, moving as if he had his umbrella in them, but more nervously than was usual.

"Now you know the whole story and you can understand why I take so much interest in your affairs."

Armour was grateful: he had no words capable of expressing his sense of relief.

"Thank you," was all he could say.

"I understand," said the Fiscal, "we need not

talk more at present, but I take it for granted that the arrangement I have proposed to you will be agreed upon, and that you will be content to regard me as the responsible person."

"As you please. I cannot think of these matters at this moment."

"One thing more I want to tell you, to save you a surprise; I think it very probable that Mrs. Musgrave will go abroad this winter and Ellie will go with her. Of course that will be quite satisfactory to you, seeing that the engagement is at an end."

There was something of his old jocularitas in the way in which he said that.

"I daresay it will be to her advantage," said Armour, trying to hold to his good resolution to leave her quite free, but feeling at the same time a cruel twinge of pain somewhere in his head and about his breast, and a very clear sense that he wished he had not been so faithful to the promise he had given to Mrs. Musgrave.

CHAPTER XV.

THE CONQUERING HERO.

THERE had been only a hint given of the intended flight to the south for the winter; but the Fiscal

understood it and all that it meant. To the amazement of Mrs. Musgrave he did not rise at the hint and offer opposition.

She misunderstood his silence for approval, and in one sense she was not quite pleased. That is to say, she did not like to feel herself of such small account as to make it easy for him to dispense with her society for several months.

He was too sad to oppose her. And when he looked at Ellie, noting how pale and thin she was growing he thought that any change would do her good, and that, by-and-by, she might come home to happiness. Meanwhile his own mind being so much disturbed, he believed it would be best for her that she should be away.

But he would miss her—so much! How this gnarled oak of a man clung to that tender ivy which had wound itself round about his life so that it seemed, and was to him, the evergreen foliage of the parent trunk.

It would be best for her, however, all things considered, that she should be away for a time; and so, when his wife urged that they should seek a warmer climate for the winter on account of their daughter's health, he made no opposition.

He had no doubt of Armour—no doubt, cer-

tainly, of Ellie. They would come together by-and-by—that is if he might permit it.

That was why he had warned Armour to be prepared for the impending flight, although it had not yet been finally decided upon. It soon was decided, however.

Returning from his victorious campaign at Gartburn, and with his new honours fresh upon him, the first visit Fenwick paid was to Torthorl. It might have been some lurking sense of gratitude to Mrs. Musgrave which inspired this prompt courtesy. She thought it was, and her congratulations were the more effusive in consequence.

But he observed that Ellie was not impressed by his importance as a British legislator; she was even miserably cold in her reception of him; and and he was disappointed.

With the affectation of a vain man he pretended to make light of his success.

“It is really nothing. Anybody could have done it as well as me if he had only taken the right way.”

Of course *he* had taken the right way, and was thus enabled to buy new admiration cheaply; for besides implying that he was above the weakness of being excited by this trifling incident in

his life, he also implied that the really great things were to come.

"Why, I thought you told the electors that you were unspeakably proud of the honour they had conferred upon you," said Ellie innocently.

"Oh, yes, one says that sort of thing in a speech—it's a matter of form. You are obliged to put it in whether you mean it or no."

"Do you say things that you do not mean, then?"

"In public speeches everybody does so—it is unavoidable. If we were to say only what we mean there would be few speeches, and they would be short."

"Unless you say what you mean, I do not understand how you can make a speech at all," was Ellie's comment.

"It is quite easy, I assure you, Miss Musgrave. You get up your subject and then tell the electors how you will turn everything to their special advantage. Make them believe that to be the whole object of your existence, and it's all right."

"I should prefer to make them believe only what I thought might be accomplished."

"Ah, you would never succeed as a parliamentary candidate."

"You do not understand these things, Ellie,"

broke in the mother; "Mr Fenwick does, and you see he is elected!"

The fact of the election was a sufficient answer to the silly ideas of her daughter about the propriety of saying only what one meant. Ellie said nothing more: she was of the same opinion still—that John Armour would never have given the people promises he did not mean to fulfil.

When Mrs. Musgrave found an opportunity of speaking to Fenwick alone she said with an expression of much anxiety:

"Do you observe any change in Ellie?"

"She seems to be a little out of sorts."

"I am afraid she is a great deal out of sorts, poor child. Did you not observe how thin and pale she has grown?"

"I hope there is nothing serious the matter with her."

"We hope not, but the doctor says she must have a complete change, and I purpose taking her to Cannes or Nice for three months or so."

Fenwick's countenance fell.

"That will no doubt set her up; but I wish the place had been nearer, so that I might have had a chance of seeing her—and you, occasionally."

"I should not think the journey one of ex-

cessive fatigue for a gentleman accustomed to travel."

Fenwick's countenance brightened into a smile.

"That's true. I'll call and leave a card," he said gaily.

"It will be delightful. We shall be so lonely, you know, for Ellie does not make new friends readily, and we do not know of anyone who is going out this winter; but I think of asking Miss Dinwuddie to go with us."

"She would be capital company for you both—she is such a jolly girl. When do you intend to start?"

"As soon as we can make our arrangements. In about a fortnight I should think."

Fenwick went away contented. He did not mind Ellie's coldness now, and he overcame his chagrin at the marked care with which she avoided being alone with him even for a moment; for he would soon have plenty of opportunities of seeing her under circumstances more favourable to his suit. He had no doubt the change would do her good, and under the influence of the sunny south she would forget Armour.

"Poor beggar!" he mentally exclaimed as he rode along, "he has fallen upon bad times. To

lose his fortune and his lass at one stroke is hard upon him."

There was a curious mingling of sincere pity and a petty sense of triumph in Fenwick's mind. He congratulated himself upon being such a lucky dog. Whatever indifference he might affect in the presence of others, he was proud of his election; and he was confident that in the end he would gain the election to Ellie's hand, too. It was not in the nature of things that any girl could go on moping long for a man who was ruined and had no prospect of being able to support a wife for years to come.

Mrs. Musgrave had very much the same idea, and her little plan was working perfectly. Now that Fenwick had promised to follow them, she at once proceeded to inform her husband distinctly of her intentions for the winter.

"Very well," said the Fiscal as quietly as if she had only told him that she was going out for a walk.

"I am sure you must see yourself how much she needs this change," Mrs. Musgrave proceeded to argue, as if he had raised some objection. "She has had far too much vexation for one so young, and she will never get over it if she is kept within sight of Thorniehowe."

"Yes, she has had some fash, like other folk," was the placid response.

"You do not disapprove of the arrangement?"

"No."

"Then you will impress upon Ellie the importance of trying to be cheerful and take an interest in her travels."

"I will make out a list of rules for her guidance and she will of course obey them. Ten minutes will be at first allowed for moping, five minutes afterwards, and all the rest of the day to be given up to laughter and sight-seeing."

"But I particularly wish you to advise her not to waste her time and health thinking about Mr. Armour."

"We can give the advice, but it is too good to be adopted."

"I am convinced she would obey if you were to advise her in earnest."

"I shall be most earnest in counselling her to abandon everything that may waste her time and health," said he solemnly.

"Then there is another matter upon which I desire to consult you. I propose to invite Miss Dinwuddie to accompany us, so that Ellie may have a suitable companion."

"Very well," in exactly the same tone as before.

"I think it will be very pleasant for her and agreeable to me."

Poor Mrs. Musgrave, she wanted to discuss the details of this important journey—how important it was in her estimation only she herself quite understood—and she could find no one who would discuss them with her. She was obliged to force the conversation.

"Then we will start immediately after the Cluden Peel party is over."

"Very well."

The Fiscal was abstracted and busy making the arrangements for his retirement from office. These were the more troublesome as his resignation had been returned to him with an earnest request that he would reconsider it.

Ellie could not take an interest in the proposed journey. At another time she would have liked to make it, but at this juncture it seemed as if she were running away from Armour when he had most need of all the help her love and presence could give him. However her father had said that she ought to go; and that was enough. But Armour could not join her at Cannes as he had done at Kirkcudbright.

There was one point, however, in which she did take some interest—that was to learn as soon as possible the date of their departure. She would have liked it to be before the Cluden Peel dinner, but knew that it would not be; and she was not disappointed when her mother informed her that they would leave three or four days after it. She was, however, able to look forward to this tiresome party with some resignation, as her father had promised to accompany them to it.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Musgrave found in Miss Dinwuddie the enthusiastic sympathy in discussing all the details of preparation for the journey which she did not find at home. Miss Dinwuddie accepted the invitation gleefully, came over to see her and Ellie about it, and would have been pleased to start at once, but that she, too, was to be at the great Cluden Peel dinner and would have been very sorry to miss it.

That “great banquet,” as Mrs. Musgrave called it, brought together the largest company that had been at the Peel since the bridal day of its present master. Light and mirth filled the rooms, and many hearty congratulations were offered to the new member for Gartburn. As Mrs. Musgrave surveyed the scene she was full of joyful anticipations.

"Ellie must be impressed by all this. She must compare the brilliant future which is before her, with the dreadful one she has so narrowly escaped from."

"She must begin to feel that it is worth thinking twice about me," Fenwick was saying to himself as he watched Ellie in the drawing-room.

"Is it nearly time to go, papa?" Ellie was whispering at the same time.

"Yes, I think we had better go soon. It has begun to snow and I expect a storm is not far off," said the father.

CHAPTER XVI.

A FAREWELL.

WHEN the Torthorl party left Cluden Peel the snow had only begun to fall in big soft flakes, which drifted hesitatingly to the ground like pieces of down, every gust of wind altering their course. The flakes fell faster and thicker as the night advanced, the wind became stronger, and the white masses were like whirlpools in the air.

The snow had ceased to fall before dawn, and the wind had become quiet. The sun was a red flame, and there was a broad prairie of fire in the sky which tinted the white ground. The cold stillness of the morning and the robin chirping on her window sill made Ellie think of the lilt:

"When the hills are covered wi' snaw,
Oh then it's winter fairly."

She opened the window; the robin came in and perched on the top of the looking-glass, with head on one side eyeing his hostess knowingly. The birds and Ellie were great friends; her window ledge was a place of general entertainment for them. A small platform had been constructed on it where a plentiful repast of crumbs was spread every morning; and in one corner was a water dish which Ellie seldom allowed to be empty. The consequence of this hospitable entertainment was that she had many visitors during the winter and spring months, although in summer time the platform was almost deserted. But Ellie did not accuse the birds of ingratitude: she was content to serve them in their time of need.

And now she wondered if that bird sitting there with his comical look of curiosity had any

suspicion that she was about to take flight and leave them all at the mercy of a servant who might or might not remember her instructions. It seemed as if she were being taken away from everything—and everybody—she liked. The thought of the loneliness of her father during the long absence of her mother and herself was a sad one. It made her even think of pleading for an alteration of plans. But he had said it was best that she should go, and she must obey with as few signs of reluctance as possible.

The two were very silent at breakfast that morning. A huge blazing fire made the room cheery and took away all discomfort from the white wintry look of things outside. The snow was thawing from the eaves of the windows and trickling down the panes in fantastic lines. The ground outside presented a perfectly smooth white surface; the shrubs beyond were like so many irregular piles of snow, and overhead was a cold grey sky. But the atmosphere was clear and bracing, exhilarating to the active worker and walker.

"I am going to Dalwheattie to-day, papa, to say good-bye to Mr. Thorburn," said Ellie as she poured out the coffee.

"Yes," he answered quietly without any symptom of surprise; "how are you to go?"

"I wrote to Mrs. Armour saying that I would go by train, and she is to have some one at the station to meet me. Can I take any message?"

"There is none, except that I shall be well pleased to hear that he is better. I'll tell Bryce to get the gig out and we can drive into the town together. Does your mother know?"

"I am going to tell her now."

Mrs. Musgrave was not pleased when made acquainted with her business.

"We really must attend to the ordinary civilities of life, child," she said somewhat petulantly; "we must call at Cluden Peel to day."

"Very well, mamma," was the submissive answer; "but you will not be going until the afternoon and I shall be home in time to go with you."

That was so far satisfactory; it showed that Ellie was not trying to avoid the call as she had done on a former occasion. Therefore with an injunction "not to be late on any account," she allowed her to go.

It was not the frost or the snow, or the want of subjects of conversation which made the father

and daughter so silent during the drive into town. They were both thinking about the impending separation. It was the first time in her life that she had been away from him more than a couple of weeks together, and she had never gone so far away. The circumstances of the moment, too, made the event the more unpleasant to them.

She had much of her father's dislike to emotional displays, and both were quiet, but each was conscious that the same subject occupied the other's thoughts.

The distance to Dalwheattie by the railway is only a few miles, and on arriving at the little station Ellie found Wull Greer waiting.

"He's just that anxious about your coming, miss, that Mrs. Armour was thinkin' she oughtna to hae tauld him to expec' you," was Wull's salutation.

"It is not far, is it?"

"Ou, no, but there's a short road an' a lang ane. What ane will we take?"

"The shortest, if you please."

"That's through the 'neep field, and if you're no feart for wattin' your feet we'll be there in nae time."

They passed down the road in the centre of which the snow had been already churned by

cartwheels and horses' hoofs into a reddish slush. Ellie was glad to be led out of this mire into a turnip field where, in spite of the snow, men and women were busy "pu'in" the "'neeps." The workers were merry at their task as they moved along the furrows in an irregular line. The left hand grasped the "shaws," pulled up the bulb from the soft ground; then a deft stroke with knife or reaping hook swept off the tops, and the turnip was ready for the byre or the sheepfold. There was plenty of time to exchange all the "clash" of the neighbourhood, and for rough jokes and personal comment upon each other. But healthy good-nature predominated amongst these blithe workers in the snow.

"It's no far noo, miss," said Wull; "yon's the hoose."

And he indicated the cottage with a jerk of his thumb.

Passing from this scene of vigorous life into the sick-room was like passing suddenly from light into darkness.

Thorburn could not be induced to keep his bed; he persisted in getting up daily, and he was allowed to have his way, as the doctor said it would be dangerous to excite him by opposition. He was now on the little sofa, propped up with

pillows and muffled in blankets. Grannie was seated beside him knitting.

His eyes brightened as Ellie entered, and he hastily threw a handkerchief over his head.

"Do you think you can bear the sight of me?" he asked before she had time to speak.

"Oh yes, Mr. Thorburn, you cannot look so ill as I have imagined you."

"Pull down the blind, mother."

The little room was not at any time well lighted by its small window, and it seemed to be late gloaming when the thick holland blind was down.

"You needna be sæe-particular, Jock," said Grannie, gently chiding what she, remembering the past, regarded as his vanity. "Ellie is nae qualmish miss that canna thole the sight o' a scart. I ken that she has gaen to help folk that were far waur to look on than you can be."

"I have no doubt, but I don't want her to think with a scunner of the last time she saw me."

"But this is not to be the last time, Mr. Thorburn," interposed Ellie. "I mean to see you often yet, and you must not take such gloomy views of your own condition."

He uncovered his face, and if the light had permitted her to see how haggard and sallow it

was she would have been grateful for his considerate precaution.

"I am not gloomy at all now," he said with a faint smile, "I am more content than I have been for many years, and am only taking a reasonable view of the course of nature. The accident has done me good—it has let out all the bad blood, and I am not the same man you used to come to at the cottage, except in the pleasure it gives me to see you again."

"I would have come sooner, only my father told me it would be better for you if I waited for a few days. But I could not delay any longer as we are going away on Monday."

"Going away?"

"Yes, with my mother to Cannes for the winter."

Thorburn was observing her face curiously, and she felt the blood tingling in her cheeks. She knew quite well what he was thinking. Was she running away because Armour stood on the brink of ruin and must fall into the abyss as everybody thought? She would have liked to assure him that it was not so, but she did not know how. He did not require the assurance.

"*He* will feel that loss more than the other. You don't want to go."

"No, but my mother is very anxious about it, and my father agrees that we should go."

"Eh, but I am wae to hear that," exclaimed Grannie sadly, "for it will take the fusion out o' my puir lad, and he is sair needin' a' that he has enoo."

At that cry Ellie felt as if she had agreed to do something wicked. She was sensible that this journey was intended by her mother to mark the close of her engagement with Armour. There had not been a word said to this effect, but that it was her meaning was quite plain. Indeed Mrs. Musgrave was now acting as if she assumed that the affair had been definitely broken off in the course of that interview which she had herself arranged, just as at first she had treated the idea of a match between her daughter and the paper-maker as too preposterous to be entertained seriously. Ellie had not attempted to force an explanation. That would be to cause unnecessary pain to them both. She was innocent of any suspicion that her mother could deliberately plan to separate her from the man to whom she had plighted herself. She was convinced that, by-and-by, when their fidelity had been proved—when it became clear that time, distance, and misfortune

had no power to alter them—even her mother would become reconciled.

So she had been passive, prepared to wait calmly until her lover came to claim her. When he did come she would place her hand in his and go forth with him to meet and to endure whatever ill fortune might have in store for them. If she could have had her own way she would have preferred that the marriage should take place at once, so that she might have what would have been a privilege in her eyes—a share in his new struggle. That would have been true happiness, and have provided a rich store of sweet memories for after years. He, however, had said “We must wait.” Her father evidently approved of that course, and it would afford her mother some satisfaction. So she was ready to wait submissively.

But when she heard Grannie’s lamentation it found such sympathetic echo in her own heart that she felt guilty of cowardice. Her troth to Armour was as binding upon her as marriage vows, and she saw how she was deserting him when she should have been standing bravely by his side helping and comforting him. She was dismayed and distressed exceedingly.

Thorburn helped her out of the awkward

whirlpool of thought into which she had been plunged.

"You mistake him for once, Grannie," he said: "her absence will put more pith into him, for he will know that the harder he works the sooner she will be back to him. There is only one thing which could take the fusion out of him—to learn what he never will learn, that she had jilted him. I'll answer for her."

Ellie made a little impulsive movement towards the speaker, and her cheeks were flushed with a grateful smile.

"There's nae need for onybody to answer for her," said Grannie; "an' I wasna meanin' to cast ony doubt upon Ellie, as she kens. I was just thinking about him at this minute — me here, and her awa' — left a' his lane to warstle wi' the world."

"He'll pull through, never fear," was Thorburn's confident assurance. "His back may be at the wall, but he has the stuff in him that makes a man fight best when the odds are greatest against him."

"Nae doubt, nae doubt, but I'm wae to hear that Ellie's to be awa'."

"It is only for a few months, you know, Grannie," said Ellie, "and we can speak to each

other through the post. He will be so busy that the time will pass quickly, and when I come home again we shall all be very happy!"

Then there was a pleasant chat about the future, and what was to happen when Ellie came home. Thorburn entered into the speculations as to the future as if he expected to be present to share their joy. At moments a grim smile would flit across his face when they spoke of the part he was to take in the rejoicings, but it passed so swiftly that Ellie only once observed it. A chill passed over her—she understood his thought, although Grannie was quite deceived by her own wishes and the cheerfulness of his speech. He knew that his place would be vacant when she came home.

His almost supernatural sensitiveness made him aware that Ellie had divined his thoughts. A slight, quick movement of his hand enjoined silence, and indicated that his assumed cheerfulness was for Grannie's sake. In his face she read this, "It is the only kindness I can do her—to let her believe that there is still hope."

He said aloud—

"You will tell your father, Miss Musgrave, that I was at the Dalwheattie market yesterday——"

"At the market!"

"Oh, yes, I made them take me out! You see, I can't get them to believe how strong I am. They would coddle me up here and kill me with kindness if I allowed them to have their own way. But I won't let them do it. Tell him, too, that I mean to be at the kirk on Sabbath, and a man who has been at kirk and 'market after such an accident as mine can't be said to die of the effects of it. Be sure to tell him all that, and how blithe you found me."

"I shall not forget anything."

"And what do you think Grannie has been trying to do? You won't believe it. She has been trying to prevent me from going to kirk. Did you ever hear the like?"

"You ken it's because we are feared that you are no strong enough yet," was Grannie's mild defence of her extraordinary conduct.

"But I am strong enough. Do you not feel how much cheerier I am since we drove through the market? I mean to be at the kirk on Sabbath, and I mean to be at Kirkcoobry, too, on the first day that John can take me. . . . I *will* do it."

It is told that people have lived beyond the physical term by the sheer force of WILL. Thor-

burn was trying to do so now; and to that end he was hoarding all his strength. He who had been so eager to die was now eager to live—but only for a few days, that he might accomplish his work of atonement and hear the message of mercy—he had no doubt it was one of mercy—which Graham had left with his sister for him.

“Is it not too much for you to do all at once?” quiered Ella.

“Not at all. They hap me so that I am like a clothes peg; I can walk a little, and Wull Greer can do all the rest for me. . . . I want you to remember him, Miss Musgrave. He is worth remembering.”

“My father told me that he was to have a small farm of his own soon.”

“Oh! . . . he did not tell me about that, but I am glad of it. He’ll give up poaching then I should think and keep out of mischief, like that old radical who became a wild tory as soon as he was rich enough to buy a cow . . . I am glad to hear it. I suppose your father has done this for him?”

“He is helping him.”

Then Ellie had to say goodbye.

“It is farewell,” said Thorburn in a low voice as he held her hand. Then suddenly drawing her

towards him he kissed her on the brow. "God bless you—I may ask a blessing for you although I may fear to ask one for myself."

"It is only goodbye," she answered, with an attempt to smile; "you will be in your own cottage when I come back, and able to play some of the old ballads for me again."

He smiled, pleased by her vain hope; he knew that it was vain. His fingers moved nervously as if they were touching the keys of a piano, and "I'm wearin' awa', Jean," was the air he heard and was dumbly repeating.

"You will make him happy," he pleaded in a low voice. The gentle pressure on his hand was sufficient assurance on that point. "He is not so deep in the mire just now as people think, and he is worth being pulled out of it. I can see a long way ahead, and I see you two together. I am content . . . be sure to tell your father, I am content. All goes as he and I would wish. He will understand."

"I shall remember everything. Goodbye."

"It is farewell," he repeated, and he was still smiling when the door closed upon her. Grannie's last words were hopeful, and almost removed from Ellie the eerie feeling she experienced in taking leave of one she was never to see again on this

side of the grave. She, too, could hope; it is so difficult for the young to realise that death is near as long as there is life and speech. But the strange tone in which he repeated—"It is farewell," made her feel cold and awed.

She had not looked forward to the call at Cluden Peel with any pleasurable sensations, but after the morning visit to Thorburn she felt much as one might do when compelled to pass suddenly from the chamber of death into a ball-room. All the commonplaces, all the frivolities of life seemed to be brought into unholy proximity with all that is most solemn.

"You were extremely dull, Ellie," said Mrs. Musgrave after the visit, and as they were driving home; "you were almost rude to Mrs. Fenwick, who really likes you and wishes to be kind. Luckily she attributed your strange manner to illness."

"I am not well, mamma," was all that Ellie could say. She was thinking that in a few more hours she would have to say good-bye to the dearest friend of all.

CHAPTER XVII.

LOOKING FORWARD.

SHE was gone. As he watched the train diminishing in the distance, and then the last carriage disappear at a bend of the line, Armour felt that the best part of him had gone with her. Long after the train had disappeared he still saw the dear white face gazing so longingly from the carriage window, with a smile of mingled regret and hope, until the curving embankment hid him from her sight.

They had been very quiet, and behaved with most respectable coldness in the presence of the others. But for his standing so long looking after the train no onlooker would have suspected that this was a parting of lovers; and even as he stood there, no one would have imagined that he was watching the dearest treasure of his life passing away from him.

He could be calm because he was already looking forward to the day when he would be watching the train coming back, and straining

his eyes to catch the first glimpse of the face which would then be bright with glad smiles.

Their real parting had taken place on the afternoon of the day before. They had met on one of the terraces of Torthorl overlooking the river. They had walked up and down, talking a little about the past and much about the future. Whatever fears they might entertain about the favours of fortune, there was one thing they were quite confident about—that they would be faithful to each other. And that confidence made the parting comparatively easy. There would have been nothing at all to disturb them in this brief separation if they had not been depressed by the conviction of Mrs. Musgrave's obstinate resolve that this should be the end of all between them.

They did not speak about that, however; both respected the mother sufficiently to believe that she would not continue to be obstinate when she found that it would destroy her daughter's happiness. So they spoke cheerfully of the future, taking sensible views of the practical difficulties before them, he resolute to overcome them, and she believing that he could not fail.

Then they said "Goodbye—it will not be such a long time till we meet again."

That sweet assurance comforted them, and he went lightly down the terrace steps to the gate which opened on the lower road; she returned to the house.

After this meeting they could afford to act calmly at the station. Mrs. Musgrave was excited; she was fussing about everywhere; and she was most gracious to Armour, treating him as an ordinary friend who had been "so good as to come to see them off on their travels." How Armour hated being told that he was "so good!"

Miss Dinwuddie was in ecstasies with everything and everybody; she had no time to observe how pale and quiet Ellie was, or to be in the least disconcerted by the unusual reserve of the Fiscal. He scarcely spoke to anyone: even to Ellie he said little, but he kept her beside him till the train came up and she was obliged to take her seat. Then he mumbled something, and stood by as if he had nothing to do with the travellers.

As the two men walked away from the station Armour was surprised and pleased to find the Fiscal linking arms with him.

"They will have a cold journey," he said; "I would have liked to have seen them safe to

the end of it; but it was impossible. However, Ellie and that Dinwuddie lass have good Scotch tongues in their heads, as the saying is, and Mrs. Musgrave fancies she has a good English tongue, so they'll manage amongst them. I wish they were home again and all well."

"It is not a very exhausting journey," rejoined Armour whilst he was saying to himself a hearty "Amen" to the wish of his companion.

"It is not the journey that fashes me—it's what may come of it Ellie tells me that—your father was at the Dalwheattie market the other day."

Although he tried to speak with the air of one who is simply curious to learn particulars of an unexpected event, he seemed to find difficulty in getting the words out clearly.

"Yes, and he was at the kirk yesterday. He insisted upon it in such a way that we were obliged to give in. Grannie says he never showed any eagerness to go to the kirk before, and she looks upon it as a sign that the end is very near. We got a pew near the door, and when we lifted him out of the gig he walked in holding Grannie's hand and leaning on my arm. He sat out the whole service and was more cheerful than

I have ever seen him when we got back to the cottage."

The Fiscal drew a long breath as if relieved of some troublesome thought.

"That is good news. He'll come round yet."

"At times I have thought so too; but the doctors will not give a decided opinion. So far as I can make out they regard these exertions as the result of excitement and not of returning strength."

"Doctors have a way of giving no decided opinion until they are certain that nature will confirm it."

"Johnstone says we will know the best or worst after the visit to Miss Graham. I am sorry I told him about her droll fancy, for he has caught it up as daftly as herself."

"Maybe her fancy is not so daft as it appears to you," said the Fiscal thoughtfully. "She and her brother were close friends, and Graham may have told her something he kept from everybody else."

"At any rate, we are going to see her to-morrow or next day."

"I suppose you are to drive all the way. Take our machine; it will be standing idle now and the outing will do the horses good. I'll

tell Bryce to be ready for you whenever you send."

"Thank you, that will be very convenient—your carriage goes easier than anything I could hire here about."

"Aye, Mrs. Musgrave was particular about it being made comfortable," said the Fiscal, pleased that his offer had been so frankly accepted.

"We will go to-morrow or next day. Mr. Moffat is to be with us, and he suggests that if the journey does not prove too much for him we should bring him back to our house or to his own cottage here."

They were by this time at the Mill. Work was going on as steadily as if the men and women had heard nothing of the pending bankruptcy of "the Master;" the workpeople looked as cheery as ever, thanks chiefly to the assurance Mr. Oswald had given them that the Mill would not be closed no matter what happened to their present employer. They were cheery also because the complacent manner of the old cashier made them believe that nothing particular would happen to the Master in spite of the wild rumours of immediate ruin which were flying about.

They were quite certain that there was little danger to fear when they saw Armour, accompanied

by the Fiscal, passing amongst them now, stopping occasionally to give some directions to one of the men in his ordinary goodnatured but decisive way. When Armour spoke everyone felt that he had practical experience of what he was dictating. More than once he had shamed a clumsy or a lazy workman by doing himself what he was told could not be done in the way he suggested. He never required to tell that man a second time how the work should be done.

When the door of the private office closed on the Master and his friend, Lawson said with a contented grin to a neighbour:

"They may say as they like, an' break wha likes, auld Oswald is right—oor maister's no gaun to break."

These comforting words speedily passed through the Mill and helped to make hearts lighter and fingers more nimble than before. The first rumours had caused dismay to all the hands, for here was a hard winter upon them, and to be suddenly thrown out of employment would have meant starvation to most of them.

In the office the Fiscal was seated at Armour's table going methodically over the statement of affairs which had been prepared for his inspection. He studied every item, questioned

everything that did not seem clear with a cold shrewdness which pleased Armour, because it satisfied him that any arrangement entered into between them would be of a purely business character.

They were three hours at their task. In the outer office Mr. Oswald was waiting to learn the result with as much nervous anxiety as if he had been charged with some crime and was doubtful what the verdict might be. He fidgeted about amongst his papers, accomplishing a little work mechanically, and then, conscious of divided thoughts, doing it all over again lest he should have made errors.

At length Mr. Musgrave closed the last sheet of the statement and leaned back in the chair.

"Everything is perfectly plain, Armour. It is an admirably clear statement of your position, and there is only one thing which could make my friend hesitate to join you."

"You mean my possible liabilities in connection with the bank shares."

"Exactly. You see there is no telling yet what they may involve. But I have no doubt we can come to an understanding. The business itself is in a sound position, most of your debtors are in the South and not likely to be affected by

the bank failure. At any rate, with such orders as you have on hand there will be no need to stop the mill."

When Mr. Oswald heard the news he was only restrained by a severe sense of propriety from dancing a reel of joy. As he could not do that he took a large quantity of snuff and spilled a great deal more.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A PILGRIMAGE.

"I HAVE been observing everything that has been going on and making notes for future use," said the minister, when he had seated himself in the carriage beside Armour, and Bryce was driving them at a steady pace over the hard frosted road towards Dalwheattie. "But I did not want to put my finger into your pie until you invited me."

"You know how I value everything you say, and you know how I have profited by some of your advice."

He was remembering that it was Mr. Moffat's counsel which had inspired him to speak out to

Ellie when he met her at the sluice. The little minister turned sharply round upon him.

"No," he said, as if speaking to himself, after closely studying Armour's face for a moment, "you are not a humbug—you are not saying that only because you think it will please me. You do respect what I say, and *I* think you ought to do so. Can you guess why?"

"Certainly; because you are my friend, and because your perception of the right way of doing things is quicker than mine."

"That might be mistaken for another sop to my vanity; now here's a sop for yours—the man who accepts advice and acts upon it is as wise as the counsellor. However, I have no intention of entering upon a disquisition as to the advantages—I say advantages advisedly, for they are many and often substantial—of vanity and flattery. What it was in my mind to say was that I am pleased with you—very much pleased."

"I am glad of that," rejoined Armour, smiling at his companion's professional perceptions of subjects for discourse in the most ordinary conversation.

"Yes, it has been a great satisfaction to me to watch you keeping your feet steady and your

head cool while fortune has been giving you hard dunts."

"But not the hardest she might have given me—she has left me her best gift of all."

"Aye, aye, she has left health, and that is her best gift. Prize it, my man, and take care of it."

There was a merry twinkle in the minister's clear, keen eyes as he said this; he knew quite well that Armour referred to Ellie.

"I did not mean health exactly, although I am thankful to possess it."

"You would have meant it then if you had ever known the want of it. But of course you mean the bonnie lass who is 'ower the borders and awa.' Well, you are right to be thankful for that, too. I wish men could always be in love; for, though the popular notion is that it makes fools of them, my notion is that it brings out the best stuff that is in a man. I have even known a fool grow wise under its influence."

"Why is it you have never married, Mr. Moffat?"

The minister looked as serious as if the question had been put to him for the first time.

"I have whiles thought of that and I positively don't know how it comes about. Maybe it

is because I have been so busy marrying other folk that I had no time to marry myself. However," he added cheerily, "there is no saying what may happen yet. I am just a laddie of three-score and twelve, and I have many a time threatened Matthey that I would find some strapping hizzie to be mistress of the manse and him yet. Meanwhile I want to know how it is you feel so much at ease about Miss Musgrave when you have yourself broken off the engagement."

"There is really no difference in our position. Our engagement was only binding so long as she wished it to be so; and all that I have done has been to tell her and her father that I do not consider her pledged to me in any other way. Her mother urged me to do it, and under the circumstances I could see no reason why she should not have her way. But Ellie will wait."

"I dare say, I dare say," said the minister meditatively, "but I am sure her mother will not."

Armour was not disturbed by that suggestion; for he knew that Mrs. Musgrave would not wait if she could help it. But what did that matter so long as he was sure of Ellie? Even when they were passing Cluden Peel, there was no jealous thought of Fenwick in his mind; but the minister

was thinking about the newly elected M. P., and of all that Mrs. Musgrave had said to him.

The horses moved quietly up the slippery brae to Dalwheattie Mill. Wull Greer saw them approaching, and informed Thorburn who was impatiently waiting, ready to start on his strange pilgrimage.

He was dressed in a huge ulster which reached to his heels; and a travelling cap with lappets which covered his cheeks completely and concealed all signs of his accident. He was usually calm, but the trembling lips and the restless movement of his eyes betrayed his eagerness. He was standing, leaning heavily on Wull's shoulder when his friends entered.

"Glad to see you on your feet again," said the minister blithely. "How are you, Grannie? Your sick man is thriving fine; we'll have him running about as lively as ever in a few weeks."

"Aye, I think he's getting on fine," said Grannie in her quiet way; and then, as if addressing a child who was going out to play, "Tak care o' yoursel' noo, Jock, and no catch cauld."

He was assisted out to the carriage, and Armour was surprised by the degree of vigour he displayed. Every precaution was taken to guard him from the effects of the keen frost. The

minister chatted pleasantly, and told some of his best stories. But during the whole journey Thorburn scarcely spoke. His gaze was fixed steadily on the window, as if watching for something which he yet half feared to see.

When they arrived at Miss Graham's squat little cottage, Armour went forward to prepare her for the visit of his father. He had already explained her idiosyncrasies as he understood them from Miss Dinwuddie and her father. Thorburn had only said:

"I have no doubt of being able to convince her that I am myself."

As Armour passed through the toy garden, with its squares and straight paths, the primness of which was at present somewhat modified by a thin layer of frosted snow, he heard, as on the former occasion, the discordant chorus of dogs, parrots, and canaries. The window was open as usual, in spite of frost and snow, and he heard the same words which greeted him on his first making acquaintance with the cottage.

"Qu'ate, ye brutes—qu'ate!" Then followed a short howl from a dog which had been chastised with its mistress's heavy staff.

"Do you remember me, Miss Graham? I

called on you some time ago with Miss Dinwuddie."

The old lady shaded her eyes with one hand, and peered under it as if she were looking at some object afar off, whilst she bent forward, leaning on her staff.

"What's your name?" she demanded, in her gruff masculine voice.

"John Armour."

"Ou, ay, I mind noo. But you're no the John Armour I ken. Naebody kens whar he is, and I canna get thae birds to learn his name and gang awa' and find him."

"I have found him, and although I did tell him your name, he is very glad to come and see you."

"Whar is he?" she said stolidly.

"Wha're ye, wha're ye," cried the one parrot; "kail brose—hoo's a—hoo's a," shrieked the other, and "Qu'ate, ye brutes," was the shrill command of their mistress.

"He is outside," said Armour, as soon as he could be heard; "but he has had a very severe illness, and it has changed him so much that you may not be able to recognise him."

"Fetch him ben," was the decisive response. The minister on one side, and Armour on

the other, Thorburn was led to the door. There Mr. Moffat halted, and father and son entered the strange little room together. There was a three-legged stool in a corner which Armour hastily pulled forward; but Thorburn remained standing.

Miss Graham peered at him in precisely the same attitude as that she had assumed on Armour's first entrance; but she looked longer. Then she leaned back discontented, but still staring at the visitor.

"Can ye no tak' aff your bonnet, man?" she said irritably.

"Will you excuse that, Miss Graham?" interposed Armour. "An accident happened to him a little while ago, and it would be dangerous for him to uncover his head. He has come to see you at great risk to himself, and in spite of all our persuasions to the contrary."

"Aye, did ye want to keep him awa, and he wouldna be keepit? That's like him. . . . Can you no speak?"

Thorburn appeared to find it difficult—the face of the woman brought back to him vividly that horrible incident which had ruined his life. At length, huskily:

"It is not easy to speak, Grizel Graham. . . . I am thinking of Eddie."

At that her eyes seemed to start forward. She rose slowly to her feet, and the tall, gaunt form was trembling. She stretched out her long bony hand, with one finger pointing at him.

"Naebody has called me Grizel since he gaed awa'. I hae heard naebody speak o' Eddie for many a lang day. . . . You are the man."

"Yes, I am the Jock Armour you knew and he knew in other times. . . . I am told that he gave you a message for me. I come to hear it."

A sudden stillness fell upon the place. Even the parrots were quiet, and the terriers were crouching at the feet of their mistress. She broke the silence in a low voice, whilst evidently searching her memory for something which was continually eluding it:

"Aye . . . an' you're Jock Armour! Vow me, man, what hae ye been daein' to yoursel'? You look as though you were an auld man, an' it's no that lang since you were a spruce young lad skippin' about the kintry, garrin' mony a braw lass sab and want her supper. . . . Aye, an' you're Jock Armour! I would never hae ken'd ye if ye hadna gi'en me my name."

"It is not always years that make folk look old, Grizel," he said, repeating the name

which had helped so much to satisfy her of his identity.

She did not seem to be heeding his words; she was still busy searching her treacherous memory.

"An' am I like you? Am I as auld like?"

Without waiting for a reply, she snatched up a hand bell and rang it violently, shouting all the time "Nell Baird—Nell, ye limmer, come here—fetch me a lookin' glass this minute."

The dogs barked, the parrots screeched, and the din was at its height when a stout ruddy-faced woman appeared leisurely at the door, with the inquiry,

"What's wrang noo, mistress?"

"Fetch me a looking-glass this minute. Can you no hear?"

"Ye'll hae it just directly."

And stout as she was, Nell Baird did return quickly with a small handglass. Miss Graham looked at her own face eagerly. She frowned: then thrust the glass away from her.

"Hoots, that canna be me. Tak' it away: it's just ane o' thae mockin' glasses that ye keek in at the fair, an' see yoursel' upside down and a' head an' nae body. Tak' it awa' an' see if you can find something wise-like."

But there was a sad note of doubt in her voice, and the frown lingered on her brow as she resumed her seat. She was disturbed: the one idea which had been so constant in her mind during those weary years had deserted her at the moment for which she had been waiting.

"Did you speak about Eddie? What was't you said?"

"About the message he gave you for me."

"Aye, aye, I mind noo," she said smiling, and nodding her head. "He was in the jail, ye ken, an' they hanged him—the scoondrels! Hanged my brither!"

Thorburn shuddered, and growing faint was obliged to sit down on the stool at last, Armour at his back supporting him. Miss Graham continued to smile and nod graciously to her visitors, quite insensible to the pain and shame which had wrecked her reason, and unconscious of the agony her listener was suffering.

"Aye, I mind noo what it was—eh, but he was the kindest-hearted lad that ever drew breath. It was in the jail as I was sayin', an' they wouldna let us hae mair than twa or three minutes thegither. 'Grizel,' says he, 'I'm gaun to gie you a man's sowl an' conscience to take care o' for my

sake! 'Deed an' its ower muckle for me to dae, Eddie,' I says. 'But you maun dae it, or I'll never rest in my grave.' That was fearsome to hear, an' it was fearsome to take or to refuse the responsibility. What would ye think I said?"

"What was it he said to you?" asked Thorburn feverishly.

"It wasna what he said to me, it was what I said to him, an' it was this—'Gin the Lord gies me strength, I'll dae onything you want, Eddie.' 'Very well,' says he, 'find out Jock Armour wherever he may be, and tell him this—that I gave myself up to the police two hours before he arrived at the station. Tell him that I die on my own confession, and no man need think that he has betrayed me, or hope to get the price set upon me. . . . Tell him, moreover, that I am sorry for the trouble I have caused him—sorry for the mistake he has made, and that with all my heart I forgive him the harm he intended to do me.'"

Thorburn's head was bowed upon his knees and there was a half-stifled whisper on his lips:

"Thank God—thank God, I am forgiven!"

But no one heard it, and Miss Graham proceeded as if there had been no interruption.

"'Bear this in your mind, Grizel,' he says,

'no matter what comes, and I will die with an easy conscience. Seek him out wherever he may be and give him my message. It will lift a curse from his soul that may ruin him.' I was meanin' to go to you at once, Jock Armour, but something happened—I dinna ken what it was—they say I wasna weel, for a while after they hanged him. When I cam' to mysel' you were off to foreign parts and naebody ever ken'd onything about ye till the-noo. I'm rael glad to see ye here and rael glad that Eddie's errand is done and he'll be able to rest qua'te noo, puir lad. He maun hae been sair fashed waiting for you a' this while . . . doon, doggie, doon."

One of the dogs had been trying to jump on to her lap as her voice had sounded low and soft. Then she sat nodding and smiling at the man who in his present position seemed to be crouching before her. He did not speak.

"Do you feel ony better noo? He said it would tak' the curse aff ye as soon as ye heard his message. . . . It maun be an awfu' thing to be gaun about the world wi' a curse on your shouthers."

He rose almost without assistance and took Miss Graham's hand.

"I do feel better now, Grizel. Thank you and good-bye."

"Guid day, guid day, Jock Armour. You maun come an' see me soon again, an' we'll hae a crack about Eddie—I want to hae a crack about Eddie. There's naebody here about that ken'd him, an' I'm wearing to hear a' your news. Folk aye said ye were a cliver chiel, Jock, an' that ye would mak' a spoon or spoil a horn. Whilk are you gaun to do?"

"I have done all that I can do already; and the horn is spoiled, Grizel," he answered bitterly.

"Find anither, then, find anither. Guid day; come back soon."

Armour led him to the door, Miss Graham speaking cheerily to them all the time as if some great burden had been lifted from her own shoulders. And for days afterwards it seemed as if the relief she had found promised to restore her mental balance completely. But the relief came too late, and by-and-by she forgot all about the visit of Jock Armour, except when his son called to see her. She went on as before with her menagerie, and was in her way happy.

The minister was waiting to add his strength to Armour's in taking Thorburn down the garden to the carriage. He grew rapidly more feeble as

they moved away from the cottage. He fell into a kind of stupor and knew nothing of the anxious glances and whispers which his son and the minister exchanged. He recovered a little when they stopped at the door of Armour's house in Thorniehowe.

The intention had been at first to take him to his own cottage, as it was thought he might feel more at ease there than in the Mill House. But the apparent collapse which appeared to be the result of the glad tidings he had heard from Miss Graham caused Armour to alter his mind and to have him conveyed to his own room. Grannie was there waiting for them, having been brought home by Wull Greer. When she found that Thorburn did not speak on his arrival at the house she said softly to herself:

"I was feared that it would end this way."

When he was laid on the bed and still did not speak, she leaned over him, feeling his brow and his hands.

"Do you ken whar you are, Jock?"

He moved a little on his side as if turning away from the light.

"No, and it does not matter, Grannie. . . . The work is done."

When the doctor came and looked at him he shook his head.

"He has overdone it, as I expected, Mrs. Armour. Still we need not despair; he has wonderful strength in him—splendid constitution he must have had—and ruined."

"It does not matter, doctor," murmured Thorburn himself; "the work is done. . . . Musgrave is safe . . . and I know that Graham's blood is not on my hands. All is well."

At intervals throughout the night he would rouse himself and murmur that consoling phrase, "the work is done."

When the doctor saw him in the morning he was lying quite passive, cool and clear, but wearied and unwilling to speak.

"Better to-day, Thorburn?" said Johnstone, in his rough hearty way.

"Aye, better to-day, and it will be all right to-morrow."

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To think of it all, lying there on his back, with the white ceiling transformed into the open pages of the record of his life! Droll, how distinct it was, and how invisible hands seemed to turn the pages so that he read the history of the past over and over again.

He could, in a sense, put his finger on the passages where he had blundered and gone astray, misled by that most villainous Will-o'-the-Wisp, Jealous Passion; here misinterpreting very simple signs, looks, and words; there misunderstanding actions which, read by the light of the later pages, were honest and natural.

Why had they not trusted him? That was the wail which rose to his lips although it did not pass them. And then the leaves were swiftly changed, and he was aware that they could not trust him because he had not faith in them; because explanation on their part at the time would only have led to new misunderstanding on his part.

It was pitiful, most pitiful, to learn this now when he was helpless and could do nothing to redeem the past . . . Redeem the past! Oh! the folly of the wish and the bitterness of it! How easily everything might have been altered; by what imperceptible slips the wrong road had been taken at first and pursued, widening and leading farther away from the right at every step until this miserable end was reached.

Then came the cry of the selfish heart. Granting his folly and his madness, why had Fate been so cruel to him as to deny him, until the last moment, the knowledge that the revengeful

act he had meditated had been frustrated, and that the friend he would have betrayed had forgiven him? Why had Grizel Graham been rendered speechless to him until now? He could have done so much in the course of these years of torture if——

But there was that terrible "If"; so slight a thing it seemed and yet it had barred him from happiness and hope. It had made his life a wreck, full of remorse and vain regret.

The leaves were turned swiftly again, and he saw that it was his own blind passion and haste to escape from the shame of his own position which had given the demon "If" power to control his life and turn every endeavour awry. If he had boldly faced the position which he had himself created; if he had remained in Scotland a few weeks—a few days—he might have learned the truth in time to have made his career so different from what it had been. If he had remembered the duty he owed to those who were nearest to him, and stood stoutly by them—that fiery record of heart-burning remorse would never have been written.

He closed his eyes in the vain effort to shut the whole thing out from his mind; but the lines only appeared to become the more distinct, and

the phantoms which they conjured up the more terrible.

He opened his eyes again and stared at the ceiling, determined that now he should show no cowardice: he would not attempt to run away from his own sin again. He would look it straight in the face and try to master it.

The watchers thought he was resting most satisfactorily, he was so quiet. When his eyes closed, he seemed to sleep; and when they opened again no one observed it.

"John," he said suddenly, reaching out his worn hand to the son who was leaning over the foot of the bed watching him.

Grannie moved in her chair by the side of the invalid and turned her face towards him. It was the first time she had heard him address his son by his Christian name. It was pronounced, too, so distinctly that her heart fluttered with new hope.

Armour hastily advanced and took the extended hand quietly between his own. That seemed to afford the father much relief.

"You think I am poor, John. You are mistaken. I am rich; I have a legacy to leave you more precious than all the wealth your bank has lost. . . . You think I am raving. No, I am

speaking calmly and truly: the treasure which I leave you has been purchased by a life of bitter experience. . . . Your mother would have understood me. Will you try to understand me for her sake?"

"I will try."

"Then this is my legacy—have faith in everything and everybody. You will live and die happier if you have faith in men and women, no matter how they may deceive you, than if you have doubted them and wronged them. Be the victim of faith rather than the slave of doubt. . . . It is a richer legacy than you can understand it to be at present."

And then he stretched out his disengaged hand, resting it on Grannie's arm, and closed his eyes.

CHAPTER XIX.

"AFTER LIFE'S FITFUL FEVER."

"HE'S sleepin' noo, Johnnie. Gang awa' and tak' a rest to yoursel'—puir lad, ye're sair needin' a rest."

Grannie said this after they had remained a long time in the same position, Armour holding one hand whilst the other rested on her arm. They had observed no change, except that he had gone quietly to sleep—the sleep for which he had so often craved, and which had been so often denied him. The intellectual cast of features, which had been so many times distorted by passion, became prominent now. The white calm face was that of a man whom anyone must have regarded with respect.

Armour did not think of death; he was so quiet, so like one who having accomplished a hard round of work has closed his eyes wearily and thankfully.

But the son seemed to hear at intervals the weird sound of a distant funeral bell, and the one long note, distinctly and sadly, pronounced the word "GONE"!

What possibilities that life had possessed; what it might have achieved if it had only fallen into the right channel.

"GONE!" boomed that melancholy bell.

He had blundered on the threshold of his career, and the impulsive, passionate nature which might have been the spring of worthy deeds had hurried him to ruin, as an engine once off the

rails tears over embankments and bridges, and down precipices, dragging the train after it. He might have recovered his place, but he had fled from all those sacred influences of home which help so much to steady a man. He had sought distraction from his own remorse and, without finding it, had gambled his life away.

"Gone!"

How curiously distinct that low distant boom was in Armour's ears, with its pitiful comment on his reflections.

But the wanderer had come back, yielding at length to the truer instincts of his nature, and although at first it had seemed that his return was only to bring misery upon those who had already suffered too much on his account, the seeming evil had proved a blessing to them and to him. He had found peace at last, and after life's fitful fever he slept well.

The bell sounded once more in Armour's brain; and then he gently laid on the sleeper's side the passive hand he had been holding so long.

"You need rest, too, Grannie," he said softly, wondering if she understood.

"Ou aye, we're a' needin' rest, but you 'specially," said Grannie in her ordinary tone: no

sorrow, no pain in the quiet voice, but the blind face was pale and the lips twitched a little as she spoke. "We'll put your father's arms aneath the claes, Johannie—let me do it mysel'."

Very tenderly she lifted the arm which rested upon hers, and, after placing it, drew the sheet up over the face. Arnour 'knew now that she understood.

"You had better come with me, Grannie."

"Aye, aye, in a minute. Bid Howison come here an' I'll tell her what she has to dae. There are things in the drawers that I was meanin' for mysel', but he can hae them."

This in the simplest and most commonplace way—as she might have directed him where to find his clean underclothing.

When he had left the room she uncovered the face and smoothed the brow with her hand. By-and-by, she took the scissors which hung from her girdle and gently passing her fingers through the curly locks she cut two. When she had put them away, her head was bowed for a little, whilst her hand rested on his brow. Then, raising herself, she said as if speaking to him:

"Puir lad—ye hae had a sair fecht; but it's a' by noo; and the Lord will forgie ye, since we hae forgi'en."

Howison came in and Grannie gave the necessary directions. There was no flurry: no emotion visible to anyone. The thoughts and feelings of the woman were too sacred to herself to be exhibited to bystanders. She attended to everything that should be done with as much self-possession as if she had no personal interest in the proceedings. Then she went downstairs and ordered dinner to be served at the usual hour.

"Thae kind o' things maun be looked after, ye ken," she said to the minister, "nae matter wha comes or wha gaes. An' it's a kind o' relief, forbye."

She went to her own room and shut the door.

On his side Armour discharged the routine of his duty as calmly as Grannie.

"It is the right way," said Mr. Moffat; "those things which come in the ordinary course of nature should find us prepared for them, and should be accepted with resignation as the Lord's will."

Snow had again fallen, and it lay nearly a foot deep on the ground, whilst by the hedgerows and dykes the wind had tossed it into considerable mounds. There was a red sun and a keen frost.

the snow was crisp and dry, making a pleasant crunching sound under the feet.

Those who came to pay the last mark of respect to Daft Jock Thorburn were for the most part workers in the Mill. They were dressed in black surtout coats which appeared to have been made by one tailor whose ingenuity in misfitting had been infinite. Every coat was "baggy," and, in many cases, hung with melancholy limpness upon the wearer whether he happened to be thin or stout. The coats had served for bridal days—the blue swallow-tail with brass buttons has long ago disappeared—for kirk on Sabbath, and for every funeral the owners had attended.

The faces were pinched with a formal solemnity; the ordinary "Guid day" was pronounced in the same tone as "Amen" after a prayer. Each took "the dram" and the piece of cake which were offered him as he entered the room, with the air of a man who makes a sacrifice and fulfils a moral obligation. Tawtie Pate was the only one who held out his glass to be helped a second time, and in doing so he whispered apologetically as he stifled a cough:

"It's a real cauld day."

They assembled in Armour's room, and the red sun was shining in through the garden window.

Mr. Musgrave and Dr. Sam. Johnstone were the last to arrive. All were standing, the chairs and tables having been removed to afford more space.

Mr. Moffat stood with his back to the window, his white hair looking like part of the snow which was gleaming outside. Armour entered with Grannie. They exchanged no greetings with anyone, but silently took their places in front of the group facing the minister.

Then he began his simple service, and the burden of all he said was, "For we live by Hope." That was his whole teaching: he did not attempt to point a moral from the life of the man who had passed away; he only spoke of him as one who, like his neighbours, had sinned, and suffered and repented. All that was good they should remember, all that was bad, forget. Then the tender burden of his prayer was repeated, and the service was over.

The folk formed two abreast and marched behind the hearse, like a black line on the white snow, to the kirkyard, the whole inhabitants of the village watching the procession.

There were five pall-bearers, but their duties were only symbolical of the times when living friends laid the dead one with their own hands in his last resting place. All they had to do now

was each to hold an ornamental black cord, whilst the workmen lowered the coffin into the grave. Armour was at the head, the Fiscal on his right, the minister on his left, Tawtie Pate and Lawson coming next. The cords were placed in their hands; and their task was completed whilst all round stood uncovered. Then without a word the mourners moved away by twos and threes, several of them with an unsatisfied feeling as if something had been left undone. It was all so cold, so quiet, dropping him down there in the snow in silence almost as profound as his own. But the silence and simplicity of this parting with one who had been lately moving amongst them had its impressiveness and its meaning for different minds.

Another old custom had been abolished. The funeral guests did not return to feast in the house of mourning. They went to their own houses to change their clothes and resume the work of life. Grannie and Armour were left undisturbed to their own meditations.

"You'll hae to see about the stane, Johnnie," said Grannie, turning simply to the practical details which still required attention; "and you might as weel hae my name put on at the same time and syne there'll be the less fash when ye tak' me hame."

"We need not talk about that just now, Grannie."

"Ou, we needna talk about it, but there's nae harm in gettin' ready for it. In the course o' nature we canna expect to hae muckle time to spare. I would just like to see you out o' your difficulties, and settled down wi' Ellie, and syne I could be content to gang awa; I'm in nae haste to leave you—dinna think that—but we ought to licht the can'les when it's growin' dark."

CHAPTER XX.

BY POST.

ARMOUR had received three brief notes from Ellie; the first dated London, the second Paris, and the third Cannes. They were very brief, he thought, but they gave him much comfort. He wrote telling her of all that had happened, and how, thanks to her father, he was likely to be able to tide over the present crisis in a much more satisfactory manner than had at first appeared probable.

After that more than a fortnight elapsed and there was no response. He heard from the Fiscal that all was going well; but even the Fiscal had

not received any letter from his daughter. All his information was obtained from his wife's letters which, although saying much about Ellie, made no reference to her neglect of correspondence.

Armour watched the post morning and evening with eager longing; but no letter came. Then he reasoned with himself: he had told her that she was to regard herself as quite free to act as she pleased; she was to be silent or to speak just as it seemed most satisfactory to her; and it was possible that she considered silence to be best at present. It was probable that her mother had persuaded her somehow to adopt this course—indeed he had no doubt of the influence which had been brought to bear upon her.

What did it matter to him? He could trust her. He knew that she would not falter and that she would be patient, and if there could be the remotest hesitation it would disappear when she learned that her father was helping him. Still there was that yearning upon him for any sign of her hand, any token—even a newspaper would have pleased him—that she was thinking about him; and he found it difficult sometimes to be quite content when he found nothing from her amongst his letters and papers.

All sorts of suggestions of possible dangers

—accidents or illness—would thrust themselves upon him and distract his thoughts when they should have been, even for her sake, concentrated on business affairs. Of course he was aware that it was ridiculous to allow such fancies to disturb him; for if anything of that kind should happen the Fiscal would certainly hear of it and report to him. But the consciousness that it was ridiculous to allow these suggestions to find their way into his brain only irritated him the more by revealing his weakness in not being able to keep them out altogether.

If he had spoken to the minister he would have been told that the strongest minds are the most anxious about their loved ones. But that would have been little consolation to him; it certainly would not have satisfied him that he had a strong mind.

At last there arrived a letter with the Cannes postmark, and although there was a momentary feeling of alarmed disappointment when he discovered that the writer was not Ellie, but her mother, he was still delighted to have news direct from the head-quarters of his affection.

“DEAR MR. ARMOUR, — As your conduct in

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the little difficulty we had to surmount has been so uniformly courteous and good, I think it incumbent on me to send you a few lines to tell you that we are all well and enjoying ourselves *extremely* in this most charming and exquisitely lovely place.

"I am amazed at myself that I have so long delayed bringing my daughter here. The change it has already effected in her is truly wonderful. I ought to mention that it has long been my intention to bring her, but she is so fond of home and has had so little desire to travel that year after year passed without the intention being carried out. The change I refer to is not merely in my daughter's health, but in her ideas of things. They are already most markedly enlarged and more becoming a lady who is destined to hold a high position in society. She has already quite caught the spirit of travel and is now desirous of making an extensive tour on the Continent, a desire with which I, for various reasons, entirely sympathise, and of which approve."

There he stopped. His pleasure in having news of Ellie was much marred by the manner in which it was conveyed. He felt that the enlargement of her ideas was meant to impress him with the fact that if she had travelled before she would

never have been attracted by him. The extended tour on the Continent, too, was intended to help her to forget him.

He drew breath at that. Who could tell what might happen? New scenes, new faces are recommended as panaceas for most mental troubles; and love is one of those afflictions which travel is supposed to cure.

He tossed the sigh away and laughed at his own folly: the love which could be cured by travel was not the love he had sought and believed he had found. They might take Ellie all over the world; they might surround her with as many wooers as they pleased, she would act and speak just as she would if he were standing by her side. She had nothing in common with those morally deformed creatures who find beaux at every turn.

He resumed the perusal of Mrs. Musgrave's letter in a complacent mood.

"My present plans are that we should travel leisurely along the Riviera; perhaps we shall visit Rome if the season permits; and return through Germany and France. My daughter has had no experience of the Continent, and every place we visit will have interest for her. We are most fortunate in having such a pleasant companion as

Miss Dinwuddie. She is always in good spirits, and from the first hour of starting has never failed in her perfect good humour. She has been all that the kindest of daughters could be to Ellie. What a treasure of a wife she will be to some man who requires a cheerful, active woman to help him forward in the world! There is a gentleman I know who would be lucky indeed if he could persuade her to share his fortunes.

"I need not say, dear Mr. Armour, how pleased I am to hear that you are likely to overcome all your difficulties sooner than could have been expected under the circumstances. I am so delighted! I hope you will be quite yourself by the time we return. Accept my most cordial congratulations.

"There is one thing I particularly wish to mention, and you will of course readily appreciate my desire to explain it to you. Ellie has agreed that she is not to write to you during our travels, and I of course expect you not to write to her. I am sure *you* can understand my motives. Under the circumstances silence can do no harm, and epistolary communications might involve so many misapprehensions on all sides. I should be pleased to hear from you myself and to learn how your affairs progress. I will, if you should wish it, tell

you from time to time of our movements, but I do trust in your honour not to impair my daughter's present happiness by reminding her of unpleasant and unfortunate events which I am anxious—for her own sake—that she could forget as speedily as possible.

“With most warm regards and respects, I am your sincere well-wisher,

“EUPHEMIA MUSGRAVE.”

“P.S.—Mr. Hugh Fenwick, M.P., is in Cannes at present, and he purposes to remain on the Continent until his important parliamentary duties compel him to return to England.”

He smiled when he first read that postscript, pitying Mrs. Musgrave's futile endeavours to command the course of Fate. But when he took it into consideration with the references to the enlargement of Ellie's ideas and to her future high position in society, he wondered whether or not this might be a kindly way of preparing him for an approaching change. It might be that Ellie did not like to write about it herself, and so had left it to her mother to explain.

What nonsense! This made the meaning of Ellie's silence clear: she wanted to gratify her mother as far as lay in her power, and she

trusted him to understand it all. He did understand, and would obey the sign; he also would be silent until she bade him speak. He would of course always have news of her from the Fiscal, and from Mrs. Musgrave herself when he chose to write.

At the same time the most trusting of natures cannot help feeling that the correspondence of father and mother are poor substitutes for that of the loved one herself. He would have been so happy if his princess had only sent him some little token from her own hand. But was not her confidence in his faith a token? . . . It was, and the highest. So he turned to work harder than ever and to wait patiently, thinking cheerily the while of the absent, yet ever present one.

He possessed two photographs which he carried always with him in a small morocco case. When disturbed by those intrusive suggestions of the anxious or uneasy mind that something might be wrong, he took out his book, and studying the tender features—to him so beautiful beyond all else that nature or art had done!—he heard the sweet voice repeating those happy words—“We can wait.” Then he was comforted, and went on again, eager to be ready for her when the time came that he might speak.

There were other important letters brought by that same post. If Armour could have read them he would have discovered much to interest him and something to pain him.

One was from Mrs. Musgrave to her husband.

"MY DEAR RICHARD,—I am surprised—I am unable to express myself adequately under the circumstances—but I am *very* greatly surprised that you are helping the man Armour in his wretched business. I *do* trust that you will remember before it is too late the duty you owe to *me* and the duty you owe to your offspring.

"I am sorry for the poor man in his misfortunes, but I cannot see my child robbed of her just inheritance in order to support him a few days longer in a business which I am told by a gentleman of great experience in financial matters (I mean Mr. Fenwick, M.P.), would swamp the Bank of England if it were thrown in. The distress which this information caused me (it was conveyed in a letter Ellie received from the man himself) has induced me to request that there shall be no further correspondence between them. Ellie at once consented. She is a good child, and has never shown any sign of disobedience, except when encouraged to it by one who should be the last to

provoke such a spirit in her. That person, I regret to say, is yourself.

"If you are resolved to ruin us, I can only say that I am thankful to the foresight of my dear father, the late Lord of Session, who secured to me my small income. That may now save us from *starvation*. But what will be said of you who had it in your power to provide us with comfort, and by your indifference to all the duties imposed on you by law and affection, have ruined us! But I cannot believe that you are so cruel—so mad, as to perpetrate this crime (for it is nothing less than a crime) against your own flesh and blood.

"I am too much excited to write calmly; but I must beg of you—demand of you that, under the circumstances, you will remember your promise to me that you would try to advise our daughter to follow the course which is most conducive to her future happiness. You promised to advise her to be cheerful and contented, but your repeated expressions of your wish that she should be with you at home make her discontented and unhappy, and quite unfit to relish the pleasures which are on every hand offered to her.

"There is a great future before her (even if you disregard all sense of duty to us, and waste

your fortune), and she is ready to accept it. I implore you not to destroy our dear child's prospects out of mere opposition to me.

"I *do* trust you will not again make her miserable by the expression of your regret that she is not at home. I *do* trust that you will not bring us to beggary by involving yourself with the man Armour. But, if you persist, I must remind you that I am her mother, and that it is my duty to save my child from the consequences of her father's infatuation, if I can.

"I may tell you that Mr. Fenwick, M.P., has been most attentive to us since his arrival here, and has enlivened us exceedingly. He has seen after everything we want—has arranged for our excursions, seen after our letters and papers, and indeed done everything that the most kindly and best of friends could do to make us comfortable. I think that you who know something of the cares of public duty will appreciate the sacrifice he makes for our sakes. I am glad to say Ellie does; and I am quite sure that if the poor child could be released from the constraint she is under in her fear of annoying you, she would at once accept his offer. I think it would be a proper thing for her to do. Mr. Armour himself has released her from the foolish engagement with him, and I am

sure that she should and she would take advantage of her liberty, if she had only a little encouragement from you.

"Now, my dear Richard, I do trust that you will consider the prospects of our child, and help her to attain the position which we know awaits her if she chooses, and in which I am sure she would be happy.

"I am most anxious to hear from you on this subject, and would be much obliged if you would answer by return of post. Meanwhile I am, your affectionate wife,

"EUPHEMIA MUSGRAVE."

Another letter was from Mr. Fenwick, M. P., to Ensign George Dinwuddie.

"MY DEAR GENERAL,—(I am only anticipating your dignity, I am not chaffing. You can call me Secretary of State, or Chancellor of the Exchequer, if you like. *I* won't be displeased.)

"I am no hand at letter-writing, as you know; but as you made me promise to send you a letter, here it is. I am jolly, the girls are jolly, and the old lady is jolly. Now what more has a fellow to say, except that we are all jolly. We drive, we bask in the sunshine, we dine, we—I was going

to say we smoke; but what I ought to say is that I smoke; and it is altogether a good time for me; and an excellent preparatory course for my first campaign in the House.

"By the way, I have taught your sister to play billiards, and she is a first-rate pupil. *She* doesn't object to tobacco, and I believe that with a little persuasion she'd take a cigarette herself. She is a stunning girl, and you ought to be proud of her.

"Write as soon as you can, and give me all your news. I'll do the same.

"Ever yours,

"HUGH FENWICK."

CHAPTER XXI.

MORE NEWS BY POST.

ANOTHER letter was from Miss Dinwuddie to her sister at Maclellan House, Kirkcudbright.

"MY DEAR SISSY,— You must not scold me for the brevity and rarity of my letters. You folk who bide at home and live at ease have no idea of the thousand and one occupations which demand

the immediate attention of a traveller and leave her too wearied to do anything but go to bed. I am going to try to write you a long letter to-day as we are kept indoors by a thunderstorm, and Mr. Fenwick is playing the 'dutiful attendant' on Mrs. Musgrave in the drawing-room, whilst they are waiting for Ellie to recover from a headache and to come out of her room.

"If I can only recollect all that I should like to tell you, there will be no more complaints about scant news.

"I mentioned that we stayed for a few days in a hotel: then Mrs. Musgrave decided upon this villa. It is on the slope of a hill, with a beautiful garden in front, and some pretty paths behind. But it has many inconveniences, especially in the kitchen department, and when I pointed them out to her ladyship (you know how she likes the title), she gave me this extraordinary reply:

"'But, my dear, there is a billiard-room!'

"Why she should place the advantages of a billiard-room above the chance of having our victuals properly cooked I could not understand at first. But I understand it now. Mr. Fenwick was coming, and this was for his convenience. She forgot, however, that he would want somebody to play with him. Well, since his arrival, he has

been almost constantly in the house (his hotel bills can't be large, for he has all his meals here), and as he has occasionally half an hour or so which he does not know what to do with, he plays billiards. You know that I have played now and then with Geordie, and I offered to do what I could to relieve his tedium by knocking the balls about for him. Of course I explained that I was quite ignorant of the French game.

"'Never you mind,' says he; 'I will teach you. . . . Does the smoke annoy you?'"

"'Not at all,' says I, taking up a cue.

"'Thanks—that's the way to cannon,' says he, as he played what he called a good stroke.

"'Since then we have been playing every day, and have become regular 'chums,' as he says.

"'But now comes the important part of the business. What do you think he has done? He has made me his confidante, and has told me, what I have known quite well all along, that he wants to make our friend Ellie Mrs. Hugh Fenwick, and that although her mother is most eager for the match, the lady herself would like to be 'ower the borders and awa' wi' Jock o'—' Thorniehowe! Can you guess who I mean? I was more amazed than I can tell you; and so will you be; and so will mamma; for you remember when

they were with us we all thought that Mr. Fenwick was the man of Ellie's choice.

"Nothing of the kind! It is the paper-maker, Mr. Armour, who is the man—though I can't for the life of me make out how she could select him when such a smart fellow as the other one was in sight.

"There I stop, and lest you should misunderstand me, I want to tell you at once that I do not like Mr. Fenwick. He is altogether too dressy, and too much in the fashion for my taste. All the same he is a very nice fellow. But you know a man may be as nice as possible to one person and very disagreeable to another. Ellie has never said a word about him or about anybody else to me, but I can see as plain as A B C that she is worried by him, and that if she was not so anxious to keep her mother in good humour she would refuse to speak to him at all.

"That is, I *think* she would refuse to speak to him; but there is no saying what hidden meanings there may be in her quiet and sometimes, as it seems to me, sly conduct. She deceived us entirely when she was at Maclellan House, and maybe she is doing the same now; for you know that Armour is a bankrupt, and hasn't a penny to bless himself with, let alone a

wife. Besides, there is some awful disgrace about him. I don't know what it is, but Mrs. Musgrave hints at it so darkly that I think he must have murdered somebody, somewhere, somehow, and has escaped hanging for it.

"I thought he was rather a nice man (didn't you?). He and I got on fine together, and I think if he had only stayed a few days longer he might have had me for the asking—bankrupt or not.

"Now, my dear Aggie, I suppose you are very much shocked at me for saying that; but you oughtn't to be shocked at the truth, you know—not to mention that I think you were yourself rather taken with him. Do you remember what you said when we were going to bed on the evening after he had gone away? You were just in a fearful temper, and you said, 'It was so nasty of him to run away just when we were getting to like him.' And I said, 'Oh! Aggie, have you forgotten——.' But that is neither here nor there. I don't want to remind you of old sores. I want to tell you what a wicked creature your sister is.

"Will you believe it? I've been playing such a game with Mr. Fenwick! You know that I am fond of Ellie; and fancying that she was pestered

by her mother forcing him upon her, and pestered by his attentions to her, it occurred to me that I might do her a good turn by flirting a little with him—just a *very* little—on my own account. So while he is making cannons I am making eyes at him; admiring everything he does; laughing at all his stale jokes, and in every way making myself agreeable to him. The result is that last night in his enthusiasm he so far forgot himself as to whisper, ‘You *are* a stunning girl!’

“Just fancy!—a real M.P. saying such a thing. I suppose the Speaker would call him to order if he dared to say such a thing in the House. He is an awful simpleton, and hasn’t the least suspicion of what a fool I am making of him.

“But the best of the joke is that Ellie seems to understand how I am relieving her, and to be grateful for it; whilst Mrs. Musgrave is under the impression that I am doing everything in my power to help her in bringing about the match. And he has the same notion.

“I can’t tell you what fun it is; but I will try to repeat the conversation we had only last night in the billiard-room.

“Ellie had excused herself from coming down to dinner—not because she had a headache, or because she was ill otherwise; but because she

had a letter to write to her father, and she had eaten enough at lunch to serve her for the day. Isn't she an extraordinary creature?—she always tells the truth! Well, there was a great suppressed earthquake of irritation on the part of Mrs. Musgrave, and some sulks on the part of Mr. Fenwick; but his ill-humour speedily passed away, and we both endeavoured to soothe our hostess. He is a real good fellow in that way; I have noticed it several times, when Ellie has done something to put her mother in a temper he has done everything he could to put her in good-humour again. That is an excellent trait in a man's character—or a woman's either, for that matter—but especially in a man who is not supposed to pay any particular attention to the *convenances* of life. It pleased me very much on this occasion, particularly as I saw that the efforts of both of us failed to mollify Mrs. Musgrave. I was quite glad when she herself suggested that Mr. Fenwick should dispense with the usual hour in the drawing-room, and go at once to his smoke. He said—

“‘Certainly. I shall go into the billiard-room.’

“He looked at me, and I jumped up at once.

"‘I will go with you,’ says I, and after we had bowed our hostess out of the dining-room I took his arm, and he led me into the billiard-room.

"Now comes the conversation that I wish to repeat to you; but as I don’t want to be bothered with ‘says he’s’ and ‘says I’s’ you will allow me to imitate one of those ballads we sing, and mark the different speakers by ‘He’ and ‘Me.’

‘He was very particular in cutting the end of his cigar and puncturing it with one of those pretty little knives which seem to have instruments for everything, from taking a stone out of a horse’s hoof to cutting a piece of bread-and-butter. He lit his cigar and chalked his cue with the most melancholy air. I could see that he was thinking about Ellie, and I must say there was a kind of pity for him in me somewhere. But why should he bother her when she has said and shown that she does not want him?

"If *she* would only speak to me I believe I could put matters straight; but you know she was always prim, and I think she is more prim than ever now. She has never said a single word to me about her love affairs, and that is irritating when you see them going on under your very nose. I once tried to bring her to it, but she only said

in her quiet, resolute way, 'I would rather we did not talk of these matters, Charlotte.' She meant to say, 'I *won't* talk of these matters to you or to anybody else.' Aggravating, wasn't it?

"But I am forgetting the conversation which I wanted specially to repeat to you. Well, after he had chalked his cue in that melancholy way, and I had chalked mine in quite a business-like way (I am becoming a real don at billiards under his direction and can make splendid cannons when the balls fall into the right position), we began.

"HE. 'I shall not play well to-night, Miss Dinwuddie. Will you excuse me?'

"ME. 'You will play well enough to beat *me*, and I suppose that will satisfy you for once.'

"HE (taking a random stroke). 'No, that will not please me—I would rather be beaten by you. I feel myself such a fool that I would like to be licked by somebody.'

"ME. 'And I suppose the poorer the player the more satisfaction you would have in being licked, according to your present humour.'

"HE. 'Exactly—hullo, that was well done. You touched almost.'

"ME. 'Yes, but I didn't quite, and a miss is as good as a mile.'

"HE. 'That is not a true, although it is an

old established aphorism. There is always a certain amount of consolation in having gone near the mark you were aiming at; there is none at all in having gone wide of it. That is what I have done, and I am feeling it deeply just now.'

"ME. 'Why, you have made six cannons!'

"HE. 'I was not thinking of the balls exactly; I was thinking of what happened to-night.'

"ME. 'The dinner—something disagreed with you. Was it the pudding? I thought it was rather heavy.'

("You can't imagine what fun it was to chaff him in this way, and if you had only seen his face you would have run away at once and got him a couple of papa's antibilious pills.)

"HE. 'I didn't try the pudding, and the dinner was excellent. My digestion, I may say, is the same, although you might not think it after all the nonsense I have been talking to you.'

"ME. 'Nonsense and indigestion don't go together—at any rate papa is very practical in his commands when his digestion is disturbed.'

"HE. 'Then I suppose it is because my digestion is good that I talk nonsense—there, do you see that? Missed the easiest cannon that was

ever offered to a player! Don't you think now that I am in bad form?

"He clasped his hands on the cue and rested on it, looking at me as if he had been drowning and was imploring me to save him.

"ME. 'You seem to be very much out of sorts. What is the matter?'

"HE. 'Oh, you know well enough—it is the way *she* is treating me. How is a fellow to get on with a girl who is eternally snubbing him?'

"ME. 'There seems to me a very simple answer to that question; it is the same which we give to a riddle when we can't find it out or don't want to be bothered trying—give it up!'

"He played several strokes after that with as much coolness and precision as if he had been engaged in a match with a skilled opponent. And yet he did not seem to be thinking of the game. He stopped when he had made six cannons and chalked his cue carefully.

"HE. 'Do you think I can make that stroke?'

"ME. 'I have seen you make more difficult ones.'

"He played, and the stroke was a success. Then he put down his cue.

"'If you will excuse me, I won't play any

more to-night. That stroke decided me—I *won't* give her up. I was never beaten in anything I took in hand, and I shall not be beaten by her. When I was playing just now I said to myself, if I make seven cannons I shall go on; if I don't I shall start for home to-morrow. You see I have made the seven cannons, and I am to go on.'

"'But surely this is not the right sort of thing to do—to decide whether or not you will seek a wife by your success at billiards.'

"HE. 'It's only a fancy, but I have won, and I mean to win her.'

"I was indignant at this, and told him so. He did not seem to take my scolding amiss, for he said:

"'Let us take a turn in the garden and I will try to explain.'

"It was a most lovely night. The moon was shining, and the stars were twinkling and, in spite of the misanthropic humour of my companion, I could not help remembering our old verses, 'Twinkle, twinkle, little star, how I wonder what'——Well, there I turned the thing to the occasion, and said to myself, I do wonder what you are thinking about?

"He smoked (it was his second cigar), and did not show any signs of relieving my mind. But

at length it came out with this very plain question, 'Do you think she cares for me at all?' (Whiff went a great cloud of smoke.)

"That rather perplexed me. If he had said it in his ordinary way I should have had no difficulty in glossing it over with some commonplace bit of flattery. But he spoke so earnestly that I was obliged to tell the truth.

" 'Upon my word, Mr. Fenwick, that is a very startling question to ask, and a very troublesome one for me to answer.'

" 'I only want to know what you think,' he persisted.

" 'Then if you will have it—and, mind, you force it from me—I do not think she does, and do not believe she ever will care for you in the way you want her to do.'

"Then we walked up the garden path which is on the slope of a hill, and down again, he puffing away at his cigar, and I pretending to pursue my astronomical studies, but watching him all the while. There was not much to be learned from studying his face. I could only see that he was vexed, and that he was trying to settle some question with himself. But, you know, if people will insist upon having the truth from one, they mustn't

expect to hear exactly what they would like to hear. How was I to help it if Ellie showed she didn't care for him, and if he insisted upon me telling him so?

"I was really sorry for him, and would have been glad if I could have given him any word of comfort. But I couldn't. He wanted the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, and he got it. I wasn't Ellie, and I couldn't help it. After he had been meditating a while he spoke again.

" 'Her mother leads me to believe that she is only playing the usual game of a shy maiden with me, and that by-and-by she will yield with a good grace. Do you think so?'

"As an honest woman I was obliged to confess that I did not think so.'

" 'That's rum,'" says he. (You see I have dropped out of my grand plan of giving you the conversation on the model of a playbook, and am just telling it anyhow. But I suppose you will like it all the better.)

" 'What's rum?' I asked.

"HE. 'That the mother should give me so much hope, and that *she* should give me none at all. If it wasn't that—'

"There he stopped, and smoked so furiously

that I thought he was trying to make clouds enough to hide the moon. I could feel that he was very angry, and I could guess that what he was going to say was that he would give her up altogether, if it hadn't been that he didn't like to feel himself beaten by a girl. Now as I knew that nothing would please Ellie better than that he should give up all thoughts of her, I urged him on.

" 'Why don't you finish what you were going to say? If I were you I would stuff my things into my portmanteau, and take the first train to anywhere to-night.'

" 'Would you?' (drawing it out after a long puff of smoke.)

" 'Most decidedly. I have often wondered at men keeping on hankering after a girl who has said plainly, "I don't care for you, I don't want you, and won't have anything to do with you." A man may happen to get a girl who has said all that, but he must be a poor-spirited fellow to take her, and you may be sure she makes his life hot for him. I believe the secret of all the matrimonial miseries we hear about is that women often accept men just to stop their worrying.'

" 'I won't be accepted on that ground at any rate.'

"I think he bit the end of his cigar off as he said that; and it was delicious fun for me to hit him again.

"My father has a saying which he tells me is an old and wise one. Would you like to know what it is?"

"By all means."

"This is it—"better a finger aff than aye waggin'." 'You can translate if for yourself.'

"Yes, I can translate it, but will you give me the the application, as the ministers say?"

"Oh, certainly. If you won't pack and be off to-night, tell our friend Ellie in the morning exactly what you want and what you mean, and believe what she says in answer."

"Ah, you don't know what women are—I beg your pardon, Miss Dinwuddie. You have become so much a chum to me in this place, that I forgot for the minute you belonged to the major sex."

"I rather enjoy the mistake, so don't apologise. But I think you have also forgotten how much you showed to me when you told me that you decided whether or not you should proceed in your suit by the result of your play at billiards. After that you won't make me believe that you really care for her."

"He didn't answer, and once more we went up the path and down again. I was glancing sideways at him all the time, but as usual I couldn't make anything of his face (Do you think he's handsome? I don't). By-and-by, He:

"'I don't know exactly how to answer that. Taking a common-sense view of the position, I am at this moment too angry with her to give an unbiassed opinion as to whether my liking for her is due to the mere desire of conquest, or to the mysterious something which chaps who write verses rave about. Anyhow, I am not going to be made a fool of any longer; and either she or her mother must settle the thing straight off to-morrow.'

"'Well done,' said I, laughing and clapping my hands, 'you are the the first man I ever knew who could take good advice.'

"'I thoroughly appreciate yours at any rate and I am going to act upon it. Whatever may come of it, my dear Miss Dinwuddie, you may be assured that I shall always be grateful to you.'

"We said good-night and parted—he going to his hotel and I coming up-stairs to my bedroom to write this nice long letter to you. Excuse mistakes; I can't be bothered reading it over; but

I shall expect from you full particulars of how Mammie and Pappie are getting on, and what you are doing, and how Miss Graham is and *all* the animals. I am awfully sleepy. Your affectionate sister,

“CHARLOTTE DINWUDDIE.”

“P.S.—We may expect great things to happen to-morrow. I am very sorry for that poor chap, Fenwick; and I have come to the conclusion that he is not such a bad sort of fellow after all. But I cannot make out how a man of so much shrewdness as he undoubtedly possesses should be such a fool as to follow a girl who doesn't want to have anything to do with him. Don't you think he is a fool? I do. “C. C.”

Another letter was from Ellie to her father. In writing she always used the word “father” instead of “papa”.

“I am wae to think of you being so lonely, my dear father; and if you only knew how glad I should be if I might only be with you to try to cheer you up, you would send a telegram off this instant ordering us home. But you won't do that because you think this outing is doing me good. You would fancy it was only my affectation if I told you that I take no pleasure at all in the

grand scenery around me. I am longing for the Nith, and for Criffel and for the mists of Torthorl. I am quite sure that I should grow well and strong if I could only have a trot down the terraces, or a walk by the planting with you.

"I don't want to complain and yet I am doing it. Mamma is very fond of this place and she is looking well. She says I am looking well, too. So you can take her report as compensation for my grumbling. She says I am to be cheerful and to take pleasure in all the grand things which are shown to me; but I am always thinking how much more I would have enjoyed them if you had been with me. I suppose that is ungrateful to mamma and I must try to get over it.

"You know that Mr. Fenwick arrived here quite unexpectedly and found us out. He is seeking fresh air to brace himself up, as he says, for his first appearance in the House of Commons. He is very kind and very useful to us."

She had begun another sentence there with "But;" and having altered her mind she scratched it out and went on:

"He does everything for us, and mamma is as much pleased with him as ever. When are we to get home? Mamma is talking of a long tour, and I thought when we came away that we would

not be absent more than two months. That time has almost passed, and if we are to visit all the places mamma talks about, it will be six months before we get home.

"You don't know how dreadful the thought of such a long absence is to me; but I suppose you would wish me to do everything mamma wants at present. I will do so—only there are some things I want to talk to you about very seriously, and I cannot write of them.

"I am afraid this is a very dull epistle, but I shall write a cheerier one at the end of the week. How I wish that I could speak to you. There, now, you will think me an ungracious and selfish body not to be pleased with all the pleasures that are offered to me. Please don't be angry with me. I would be content if I could only be with you. Your loving daughter,

"ELLIE."

When the Fiscal had read his daughter's letter he rested his head back on the chair and looked up to one of those white busts of eminent lawyers which stood on the top of his bookcases. It was the head of a famous judge—famous for social qualities as well as legal acumen.

He had often consulted those silent monitors,

and helped himself out of difficulties by trying to imagine what they would have done under given circumstances. But in the present case he found little assistance. The question was not one of law but of sentiment, which is often more intricate than an Act of Parliament, and capable of as many interpretations.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE RECALL.

HE would have known how to act had the question been nothing more than this—"Are you two young folk quite sure that you are not making *the* mistake which means absolute ruin to the man, the same for the woman, perhaps, and certainly much misery for her?"

But there were other considerations. There was the mother, who undoubtedly meant well however much her views might differ from those of Ellie and himself; and he was aware that the plan she proposed would place their daughter in a satisfactory position. More potent still was the remembrance of his own relationship to Thorburn.

(Strange how that man even in his grave was to influence their lives!) The secret of that night in the shed of Campbell's farm was by Thorburn's own wish to be buried with him. He had striven to prove that his death was not the result of the accident, and he had charged Musgrave to guard the happiness of his son. Then if Armour's happiness depended on his marriage with Ellie, the Fiscal's course was to respect the wishes of the dead, and to bear in silence what remorse or haunting doubts might visit him.

In this complication he could only say to himself:

"Let them prove to me without prompting on my part that they can be faithful to each other under these petty trials. If they cannot do that, it is best that they should part. But there must be no unfair pressure upon either of them." So he wrote first to Ellie.

"I think you are the most wicked girl that ever was born, my bonnie bairn. The idea of a daughter insisting upon giving up all the glories of the Continent because her stupid old daddie, biding at home in solitude, happens to say that he feels a bit lonely! Such a thing never was heard of before. You ask Miss Dinwuddie what she would say to it?

"I'll be bound she would take a common-sense view of the case, and would tell you that your father could get on very well without you, and would have to do it some day, so that you had better let him down easy by preparing him for the change.

"How am I to tell you in my selfishness to go to the gorgeous palaces of Italy, see pictures, eat bad dinners, live in uncomfortable lodgings, submit to be cheated at old rag and bone shops, bask in the sunshine whilst we are in the midst of snow, and come home with grand stories of wonderful adventure at carnival, opera, and ball?

"I cannot do it. I am just a selfish, unfeeling old body and must have my own way. You *must* return at the expiration of the time allowed to you. You must come or I will stop all supplies and leave you to beg your way home when you discover that without me you can get credit neither for board nor lodging!

"What do you say to that, my dawtie? Do you not tremble at the voice of the tyrant? I expect you here within a week after the day on which you receive this mandate. I mean to play the part of the cruel parent and rob you of all those pleasures in foreign parts you have been

dreaming about. Come home at once, or—well, I am not going to tell you what the consequences will be; but they will be terrible.

“Now you know my will, obedience must follow; and on your return there will be a fatted hen killed and all sorts of news ready for you.

“These are the last words which the post will bring you from your stern and unrelenting but still loving father,

“RICHARD MUSGRAVE.”

He next proceeded to write to Mrs. Musgrave.

“MY DEAR SPOUSE,—Your long letter has interested me very much, and as it shows me the necessity for our meeting at the earliest possible date, I think it unnecessary to follow your example in writing at length concerning matters which we must discuss together.

“I will only say that there is no danger of ruin for me and starvation for you, unless you bring it about yourself; and I am quite ready to give Ellie whatever advice may most conduce to her happiness. I do not think I have ever said anything to her yet which was not prompted by

that motive. I am sorry to curtail your pleasure in any way, but I am compelled to ask you to return with Ellie at the date originally agreed upon. I trust you will oblige me in this, even if you should please to make another excursion.

"I am glad to have such good accounts from you of the excellent condition of your health. I shall be able to judge of it myself in a few days, and to congratulate you personally."

He considered for a few moments whether or no he should mention Fenwick, and decided not to do so. He signed the letter with the customary marital formalities, and despatched it with Ellie's at once.

The recall was obeyed with an alacrity which surprised the Fiscal as much as it pleased him. Mrs. Musgrave with Ellie and Miss Dinwuddie arrived a day earlier than they were expected.

"We came away as soon as we received your letter," said Mrs. Musgrave with the air of a dutiful wife, who has made a sacrifice for her own pleasure in order to please her husband. But somehow the manner suggested to him that she had been, for some reason, glad to find an excuse for the immediate return.

"Oh, yes!" said Mrs. Dinwuddie with an un-

dercurrent of disappointment in her tone. "I couldn't persuade Mrs. Musgrave or Ellie to stay a moment after your letters arrived. Besides, Mr. Fenwick left us two days before that."

"Oh," said the Fiscal dryly, comprehending why his commands had obtained instant obedience. "I thought the great statesman intended to stay away until his important duties absolutely compelled him to return!"

"Such was his intention," said Mrs. Musgrave in her most stately manner, and with a somewhat curious glance at Miss Dinwuddie, "but urgent affairs called him home almost at a moment's notice—he had not even time to explain to us what they were. I hope there is no serious illness in his family."

"I have not heard of any unusual occurrence at Cluden Peel. Possibly his merits as a politician have been already recognised, and he has been offered some high post in the Government."

"You know it could not be that, Richard," said Mrs. Musgrave, frowning severely at this satire, "for he has not yet taken his seat in the House."

"Ah, yes, of course—but you have spoken so much about his statesmanship that I began to think of him as an old hand in politics. However,

I dare say we shall hear great things of him as soon as Parliament opens."

That ended the conversation until Mrs. Musgrave should change her travelling dress and obtain a little rest. But Ellie did not think of changing dress: her one thought was to be alone with her father, and presently they were walking in the bright spring sunshine by the planting, where the tender bloom of coming buds made a faint blue haze over the trees.

"Now, my fine lass, what is this very serious matter that you wanted to talk about and couldn't write about? Your face hasn't got the colour on it that it used to have."

She smiled faintly, clinging to his arm with both hands, and looking up at him with eyes in which joy at being with him again and sorrow at her own thoughts mingled.

"When I was away, papa, I thought that I could not write about it, and now that I am with you I feel as if I could not speak about it."

"Hoot, toot, toot, you gomeril; that's a very bad account of yourself. Have I not brought you home expressly that you might tell me about everything that is worrying you. . . . Come, I'll help you; it is Armour you want to speak

about. Well, he is getting on first rate, and in a few years I expect him to be in a better position than ever. What of him?"

"I am glad to have this good news; but it was not about his prosperity I wanted to speak, it was to ask you—did he come to you himself and say that he wished our engagement to be broken off? I know you like him, papa, but I would rather you did not try to soften it on my account or on his. Only say, is it true?"

The Fiscal looked grave and turned towards the house.

"Who told you this?" he asked.

"Mamma told me, but I thought she might have made some mistake. Did he say it himself without you making any complaints about his misfortunes?"

At that the girl's head bent slowly forward till it almost touched his arm, and she walked on in silence.

"It was the right thing for him to do, and I told him so."

"Then, do you, too, wish to take me away from him?" she said timidly. "Do you wish me to take Mr. Fenwick?"

The father pressed her arm tightly under his own. He saw now the influence which had been

brought to bear upon her, and he was angry, but he only showed it by looking graver than before and speaking more gently.

"I have told you that I do not wish you to take any one but the man you feel in yourself that you can trust your future to. Now you are not to say another word about it. I am going to have a little conversation with your mother, and when that is over I shall tell you the result."

He led her into the house, but all his tenderness could not soothe the pain she felt in knowing that Armour had been the first to propose that they should part. It seemed indeed folly that she should cling to one who had been so ready to leave her and turn away from one who followed her so faithfully as Fenwick.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A BARGAIN.

WHEN Mrs. Musgrave entered the library she recognised the fact that her husband was more deeply moved by anger than she had ever seen him before. He maintained his calmness of voice, however, although the notes were harsher than

usual. After she had seated herself, he took up his favourite position on the hearthrug, hands clasped behind him and the fingers moving as if mechanically swinging his umbrella.

"There is a danger of a very serious misunderstanding between us, Euphemia, and I am anxious to find some means of avoiding it."

"I suppose you refer to the affair with Ellie and the man Armour," she said, much disturbed by his manner, but striving still to hold her own.

"That is precisely the case, Mrs. Musgrave."

He had spoken sternly, and she was silent. There was something in his voice which suggested all sorts of dreadful possibilities to her. His look, his manner, and voice were all accusing her of some great wrongdoing; and presently he would doubtless accuse her in words.

Yet she could not feel that she had done anything wrong. She had been doing and was doing only a mother's duty in striving to induce her daughter to accept a good settlement in life instead of a bad one. It was right and natural that she should do so. Her husband ought to have found it to be his duty to aid her, and she simply *could* not understand why there should be any difference of opinion between them on the subject.

But there being a difference, she could only attribute it to some error on his part, and, being unable as well as unwilling to argue with him, she believed that she was performing the duty of a wife in overlooking his error, and proceeding in her own way to do what she knew to be right for their child's sake.

Whatever might have been the motives for their own union, they had lived comfortably enough together for many years. They had led an orderly and even life, respected by their friends and neighbours, and without any serious difference between them until now. In her way she was proud of him for his steady, earnest work, and the esteem which it had earned from others. She had her faults, of course; but she had been a faithful, and in some respects a useful wife to him. And now whence came this danger which menaced their peace?

As they remained silently regarding each other, and these reflections passed through her mind, the first feelings of bewilderment and alarm at his manner gave place to those of rebellion and of indignation against Armour for being the cause of this strife.

The Fiscal had his retrospections too, running much in the same strain, but starting from a dif-

ferent point of view, and arriving at a different conclusion. He allowed her credit for her good intentions; but he, on his side, was unable to comprehend how she could wish to force Ellie against her inclination to marry a man like Fenwick—who was a poor creature, notwithstanding his ancient family—when the girl had made a much wiser choice. He could not understand why she was unable to give him credit for the judgment which every one else admitted.

He recognised that they stood at a critical juncture of their lives. They were about to decide the course of their own future as well as Ellie's.

He hoped that she was also conscious of that fact—conscious of all the sorrow which any serious misunderstanding between them would entail upon Ellie. But as he watched the changing expression of her face, he feared that one of the obstinate moods was coming upon her, and in that case reason would have little sway over her. Yet, shrewd man as he was, he could not fully realise all the considerations which were passing through the woman's mind.

She broke the silence with one short word uttered coldly:

“Well?”

"Well," he rejoined in his quietest way, "I want you to try and help me to avoid the misunderstanding."

"If you will be kind enough to explain what you mean, of course I shall do my best to help you."

This was spoken with that degree of politeness which he knew to be a signal of defiance.

"The explanation will be easy; the difficulty will be to enable you to see the consequences of your own conduct."

"When you have told me what is in your mind, Richard, perhaps I shall understand it."

There was a ring of anger in that and it pleased him, because the voice and manner were natural.

"Then this is it—your conduct in regard to Ellie is doing her much harm, and does not reflect credit upon you or upon me."

At that Mrs. Musgrave pulled up again, and sitting bold upright in her chair she asked sharply:

"Do you mean to question the propriety of my conduct? No one can say that there has ever been anything in it derogatory to your dignity or my own."

"I am afraid that any one who understood as well as I do how you have been courting Mr.

Fenwick for your daughter would think that you had sacrificed not only dignity, but self-respect."

"I cannot listen to such an accusation as this," she exclaimed, rising and moving towards the door.

He did not stir from his position, but he said firmly:

"You promised to help me to avoid misunderstanding. I hope you mean it, and if you do, you will sit down again and let us talk this matter over quietly."

"How is it possible for me to talk quietly when you insult me in this way?" she said, turning, but unable to yield so far as to resume her seat.

"Our position is too grave to admit the frivolity of insult," he replied, and his sense of humour rendered him conscious that he had uttered one of those stilted phrases in which Mrs. Musgrave delighted. "There ought not to be any insult in telling you that I do not like the way in which you are acting towards Ellie—and me, although that is a minor consideration."

"This is too ridiculous!"

She always fell back on this cry whenever she was unable to answer him. She made a second movement towards the door, and was again restrained by his voice.

"You must listen to me, Euphemia, and with

all the earnestness of which you are capable. If you again show that you wish to leave the room before we are done, I shall not ask you to remain. But, bear in mind, that if you do so, my daughter and I will leave the house—and you.”

This was not uttered as threats usually are: the tone was one of sadness, not passion. She felt that the chord of attachment was strained to the limit of its bearing power, and that it would snap if a fraction more of weight were put upon it. She knew that, once resolved, nothing could charm him back to the old easy-going ways of their domestic life in which she had certainly been allowed to have very much of her own way, if not all of it. But the mere fact that she had so long held autocratic sway made surrender the more difficult.

And then she had visions of the terrible scandal there would be about her temper if he should really carry out his threat and leave her, taking their daughter with him. She was again dismayed, although not yet submissive.

“Do you not think it is somewhat late to begin your lessons on the law of domestic duty?” she asked bitterly, as she sat down, arranging her skirt so that the folds might fall gracefully around her.

“The lesson has only now become necessary

—and that is a compliment to us both, as you will see when you come to think over it.”

“I cannot pretend to be in a humour for compliments.”

“Do not be afraid that I shall offend you with too many of them. There cannot be any compliment in telling you that you have caused me as much surprise as vexation by your endeavours to force Ellie upon Fenwick. My notion is that no man can value a girl who is as it were flung to him.”

“Force her upon him!—fling her to him!” cried the mother indignantly, and yet sufficiently conscious of the truth of the reproach to feel the sting deeply. “The man is madly in love with her.”

“I think there is only one person with whom he is madly in love—that is himself. We have nothing to do with that, however: what concerns me is that you induced him to follow you to Cannes, and now by the unlucky coincidence of your return it will appear as if you followed him home.”

“We obeyed your own summons, Richard: you cannot blame us for that.” (She was proud of being able to score one point in this disagreeable conversation).

“Just so: but would you have obeyed as

promptly as you have done if he had not started before the arrival of my letter?"

She would have given a great deal to have been able to answer truthfully that she would certainly have returned the moment she received his emphatic command to do so. But as she was unable to do that, the rebellious spirit, which resents more than anything else being compelled to feel that it is in the wrong, rose again and she would have made another effort to escape from this ordeal. The consequences of such a course, however, were too deeply impressed upon her, and she retained her seat, taking refuge in a reproachful and dignified question.

"Can you doubt it?"

"No," he replied emphatically, and he left her to guess what it was he did not doubt. "But let that pass. The important matter is this: Ellie is yielding to you because she does not want to vex you although the pursuit of the man is most repugnant and distressing to her. What she does not see, poor child, I do; and I believe that you will be as much vexed as myself when you see it too."

"What is it?"

"Can you not see?—Ellie by obeying you and not sending Fenwick about his business at

once is supposed to be manœuvring with you to catch—I believe that is the word used—to catch the new M.P. who happens to be the heir of Cluden Peel.”

“Who would dare to imagine such a thing in association with my daughter?”

“Folk will not only imagine it, but believe it and say it if you do not alter your course.”

“How can I help Mr. Fenwick being devoted to my daughter? I am proud of it, and proud to think that she is in every respect worthy of it.”

“That is very right and proper; but at the same time there is no need for your getting the reputation of being match-hunters. Why, even Miss Dinwuddie cannot help jesting at it.”

Mrs. Musgrave’s face became crimson, but she spoke with lofty scorn.

“You will oblige me by not referring to Miss Dinwuddie. I have been much deceived in my estimate of her character.”

“Why, I thought she was almost perfection, according to your last letter.”

“I was labouring under a mistake then; now I am glad that she is going home by the afternoon train.”

“Oh! . . . I daresay you have good reasons

for this sudden change of opinion; but I shall not inquire into them. Should there be any unpleasantness between you, however, I have no doubt that will add spice to the pleasure with which she will describe your little plans to thrust your daughter upon Fenwick."

At that the pride of the mother rose above her discretion.

"My daughter does not require to be thrust upon anyone. She has already refused Mr. Fenwick twice!"

"Ah and still he seeks her. Poor bairn, how she must have been worried. I think you should refuse him too, Euphemia."

"Me refuse him?—the man has not proposed to me!"

Had the Fiscal been in his ordinary state he would have closed the interview with a sly expression of his regret that Fenwick could not do so. As it was, he proceeded seriously:

"No, he has not proposed to you, but he is only following Ellie because you encourage him and even urge him to do so."

"I have done nothing more to encourage him than if they had both been only friends who trusted me with their confidence."

"Yes, but you know what mischief meddle-

some friends always work in these matters—and meddlesome mothers work more evil than the best of friends.”

Mrs. Musgrave would have known how to reply if he had been scolding her, but as he was talking to her in a calm, confidential manner, charging her with no greater offence than excess of zeal, she could not maintain herself in a sarcastic state, or even in a rage, and so was at a loss how to reply. But her dislike for Armour increased the more conscious she became of the weakness of her position and of the unpleasant interpretations which might be placed upon her conduct by outsiders. She took refuge again in a question.

“What is it you want me to do?” she asked helplessly.

“Nothing.”

She looked at him as if he had suddenly set aside his gravity and propounded a conundrum.

“I cannot make out what you mean.”

“It is simple enough: leave Fenwick to his own devices—don’t persuade him that Ellie will change her mind—don’t have him for ever dawdling about here—and don’t worry our bairn with your blethers about his great position in society

and his general fitness to be her guidman. In brief, leave them alone."

Here the poor mother began to detect a strategical movement to thwart her long cherished plans for her daughter's future, and she called all her cunning to her aid.

"And what will happen then?" she inquired, with a forced smile.

"What would have happened long ago if you had not interfered—Fenwick will accept his dismissal, and Ellie will regain her health."

"You do not wish me to forbid him the house?"

She fancied that she was leading up cleverly to a climax which would reveal to her husband that he was himself as much at fault in regard to Armour as she was—perhaps—in regard to Fenwick.

"Certainly not," was his answer.

"You do not wish me to tell him that he is not to dine here to-morrow?"

"By all means let him come if you have asked him: but you must remember it is on condition that there shall be no more games at matchmaking."

Then came the grand climax which she had so cunningly prepared.

She was really proud of the cleverness with

which she had managed it. Smiling superciliously, Mrs. Musgrave with an air of triumph observed:

"And you, Richard—whilst compelling me to give my friend the cold shoulder—you will give Mr. Armour every opportunity to make sure of our daughter. Is that fair?"

"It would not be fair if I did it. But I have no intention of doing it. The neutrality which I ask you to observe, I shall observe. But now that we have settled about Fenwick, there are some things in relation to Armour which I must explain. When he, finding himself in difficulties, said that he was ready to give up all claim to Ellie, I thought it was a very sensible and honest action on his part."

The Fiscal paused, and for the first time moved from his position on the hearthrug. He went straight to his desk, and rested his hand upon it as if about to open the secret drawer.

"Decidedly, a most honourable action," said the wife smiling with feelings of self-gratification that she had been the inspirer of the action so praised, and of chagrin that it should have obtained so much favour for the man she disliked.

"Yes, a most honourable action," repeated the Fiscal mechanically, whilst his hand still rested on the desk, and his chin dropped nearer to his

breast; "a most honourable action. That is not what I was going to explain. . . . I was going to tell you something which may startle you. I have always liked this Armour; and some time ago I found out that he was the son of a person for whom in early days I had a great liking."

There he lifted his head, and fixed his eyes on his chief monitor, whilst Mrs. Musgrave's face grew dark. He continued:

"I am not going to tell you any romantic story of my life before I knew you. There is nothing at all in it that is not quite commonplace. . . . The girl married Armour's father. She was unhappy and died. . . . I am glad to be able to help her son. . . . That is all; and now you understand the reasons for the friendliness with which I regard Armour, you will, if you have any respect for me, endeavour to overcome your prejudice. . . . I hope you are not much vexed."

She was neither startled nor shocked, but she was not pleased: however resolutely we may shut our eyes to the old loves of those to whom we are united, there is always a certain degree of bitterness in being reminded that they have existed.

"I do not think that the explanation you have given of your motives for helping him is of a

nature to make *me* think the more kindly of him," she said at length coldly.

"Perhaps I should not have told you," he rejoined, his eyes still fixed upon the white judge above the book-case; "for there is another motive, and the reason of it will touch you keenly. If I do not act as a true friend to Armour, I shall be a dishonoured man, and you and Ellie will share in my disgrace."

At that Mrs. Musgrave sprang to her feet with a cry of dismay. It was not his words but his manner which alarmed her.

"Richard!—what are these dreadful things you are saying? You a dishonoured man!—we disgraced! Oh, you are not well."

He turned towards her a face white almost as the bust on which he had been gazing.

"It is true—I am not well. I need rest and change. A few weeks hence I shall cease to be the Fiscal, and then you shall have your fill of travelling, if you like. Meanwhile, make your mind easy: I am not dishonoured, and you are not disgraced. There is only one person who can bear witness against me, and he will be silent until you compel him to speak."

"You confuse me—what does it mean—who is that person?"

"Myself," he said with gentle gravity, keeping his eyes fixed upon her. "Will you force me to speak?"

"How can I do that if you wish to be silent?"

"I have no wish to be silent. I am compelled to be so by the will and for the sake of others. You only can open my lips if you persist in your interference between Ellie and her lover."

"You are trying to frighten me," she said, drawing back and her sympathy disappearing.

"Well, perhaps it is so. I did not mean to say so much as I have done. Try to forget it all except this: I am bound by a promise to the dead to be Armour's friend in good or ill fortune, and you must not interfere between him and Ellie. Leave them to settle the affair for themselves. I will not say a word to one of them until they ask for it. Will you promise the same?"

"Of course it is easy enough to promise to do the same; but Mr. Fenwick comes to me and asks for advice."

"Then advise him to go to Ellie and to take her answer as final. That is what I mean to do with the other. Is it a bargain?"

"I will do as you wish—but you must explain

to me all these strange things you have been saying."

"Some day—perhaps. Some day it must be known," he said as his fingers touched the secret drawer, evidently moved by the desire to take out the statement of the incidents at Campbell's farm and to read it to her.

But he left the drawer unopened and went back to the hearthrug, resuming much of his ordinary manner as he did so.

Mrs. Musgrave had risen. She was pale, perplexed and altogether confused as to what ought to be her proper action in the singular position in which she was placed. Here was her daughter whose absurd fancy was to be allowed to have its own way, and shut her out from what would have been a most desirable alliance; and here was her husband, whose honour had been held beyond reproach, telling her that he was metaphorically at the mercy of the man she now thoroughly detested. She had suffered more unhappiness during the last year and a half than she had done in the whole course of her life, and it was all due to this man Armour. Yet she was expected not only to be kind to him, but to accept him as her son-in-law if her daughter pleased.

"I'll try to do what you want, Richard," she

said in a dazed way; "but you have frightened me. Will you let me go now?"

He took her hand and led her kindly to the door.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A RESOLUTION.

THE shock to Mrs. Musgrave was much greater than she had shown to her husband—much greater than she was willing to admit even to herself. The idea that her husband and, through him, his family, should be under obligations to a person like Armour was more than she could bear.

Up till now she had not had any special dislike to the man although she had never cared for him. She had received him with courteous civility when he came to Torthorl, and she had endured him whenever he had been thrust upon her elsewhere. But she had never lost sight of the fact that he belonged to a lower grade of creation than her daughter, and that he was no fitting match for her.

But she positively and unreasonably hated him now when she learned that in spite of his bankrupt

position he was the master of their respectability. It was of no consequence to her how that master-ship came about. She had been told that she was not to inquire, and she was obedient—because she did not want to hear the disagreeable “some-things” which the Fiscal thought had best be kept from her.

She went straight to her room. She would not go down to lunch, excusing herself on the ground of excessive fatigue. Miss Dinwuddie would pardon her. Miss Dinwuddie was quite willing to do so, and sent a thousand, thousand good wishes and hopes that she would be quite well again after a night's rest. At the same time she regretted very much the necessity which compelled her to depart without seeing one who had been so kind and good to her. However, she would be back soon, and then she would be able to express her gratitude in person. She was, in fact, her debtor for life for the pleasures which she had provided, and for the happiness with which the memory of these pleasures would store her future life, &c., &c.

But although Miss Dinwuddie could afford to treat these symptoms of ill health with formal courtesies, Ellie could not. She was anxious to see

her mother, and was glad when Miss Dinwuddie's departure permitted her to do so.

Mrs. Musgrave was really ill this time, and she had gone to bed. After a long journey the digestion is apt to be weak, and at this moment the poor lady felt as if the whole world looked on her with frowning face. Her husband had spoken with a sternness which he had never shown before: she knew that Ellie was not pleased with her, and, worst of all, there was the galling revelation to her own conscience, roused by the Fiscal's sharp words, that she had been deficient in self-respect in her eagerness to secure what she considered the best possible settlement for her daughter. She could only take refuge in that haven of discontented minds—the thought that she had been greatly misunderstood.

And she had been misunderstood, poor lady, although the fault was entirely her own. She had escaped the snares of passion: marriage had been to her little more than an "arrangement" made between two people for their mutual advantage. To be sure there had been a time when a certain halo of romance had glorified the idea of binding herself to another person for life; but that period had long passed before she became Mrs. Musgrave. She had accepted the suitor who had been ap-

proved by her father, and until now she had never had any serious reason to repent.

But Armour, the bankrupt paper-maker, as she mentally dubbed him, had altered everything—altered her husband, altered her daughter, and she could not forgive him.

“Are you better now, mamma?” asked Ellie, bending over the bed and arranging the pillow.

The mother hid her face and sobbed.

“I did not mean to be unkind, Ellie. . . . I was doing what I thought was best for you.”

“I am sure of that, mamma,” was the gentle answer.

“But your father says I have been cruel and that my conduct has been quite disgraceful.”

“No, no—he could not say that.”

“But he did say it, and it is dreadful. I shall never get over it. Such a thing to be said of me! I always thought that I had been most careful to preserve our dignity!”

“Yes, mamma, but you know people have different notions as to what is dignity.”

“Very well, I make no further protest. Marry anybody you please and take the consequences. Only don’t blame me afterwards. I will have

nothing more to do with it. My heart is broken and I want to rest just now."

Ellie carefully drew the overlet up to her chin; and then, as she turned away:

"I will try to prevent any noise, mamma," she said with a suppressed sigh as she sat down by the bedside.

Mrs. Musgrave, wearied by travel and excitement, soon went to sleep; and as Ellie watched her, there came the great question which so seldom stares one directly in the face—was she to torture her mother because she wished to please the man whose only claim upon her was her own endowment?

She rose and went to a little writing-table. Paper, pen and ink were ready. Would she write? Yes, and this was what she wrote:

"Forgive me, if you can—you will do so if you think with me and if you love me. My mother suffers so much on account of my promise to you, that I am compelled to withdraw it.

"I have in some little degree a relief in saying this as you have yourself declared that you had no wish to insist upon our engagement.

"Whatever you do, and whatever becomes of

me I shall always be interested in knowing that you are happy and successful.

“ELLIE.”

Then with much hesitation she folded up the paper, and, finding that her mother still slept, she crept out of the room and gave it to a servant to carry to Thorniehowe.

By that time it was growing dark.

CHAPTER XXV.

A GENERAL SURPRISE.

FENWICK had carried out his resolution as announced to Miss Dinwuddie in the billiard-room at Cannes; he had seen Ellie, and he had seen Mrs. Musgrave.

To Ellie he said,

“I have asked for this interview, Miss Musgrave, in order that I may obtain from you a final answer to my question—do you think it worth your while to take me? You have had time enough to consider, goodness knows. I don’t want to bother you, but I believe that we could get on together very well, and I know that you

would make me very happy. I understand that you are quite at liberty to decide for yourself; and so, you see, I am not going to beat about the bush. I ask you once for all, is there any hope that you will change your mind regarding me?"

There was a great deal of petulance and no degree of dignity in the manner in which he expressed this blunt question. But Ellie pardoned the manner on account of the opportunity it afforded her to dispose of his unappreciated attentions. Indeed, she had never liked Mr. Fenwick so much as she did at that moment. He had spoken frankly, if somewhat discourteously.

"Do you remember our interview at Torthorl?" she asked.

"Yes, and your reply."

"Then I have to give you the same reply now. I am sorry, Mr. Fenwick—very sorry—that you force me to repeat this answer. You can have no idea how much you distress me, or I am sure you would not do it."

He drew breath, fumbled with his hat, and walked to the window sulkily. He looked out at the window, and saw nothing. The rich sloping gardens, the pretty villas, the clear blue sky were invisible to his irritated senses. He was obliged to own

that for once he had miscalculated his own powers, and misjudged a woman. It was not an agreeable admission, and he swallowed it with more difficulty than he would have done a dose of castor oil.

"Very well, Miss Musgrave," he said, turning to her again; "this is the last time I shall trouble you. When we were speaking about this matter at Torthorl, I thought you might change your mind. I see that you cannot. Of course, you will forgive my obstinacy when you know that I have never before urged this question so earnestly. Pardon whatever annoyance I have given you, and, believe me, I shall always be your friend, if I may not be your lover."

He bowed and quitted the room, feeling that he had been very much ill-used. He was in fact in a passion when he went to Mrs. Musgrave, and although he managed to control his temper so far as to speak with superficial civility, he could not help some display of the chagrin with which he had received his final dismissal.

"I have come to say good-bye, Mrs. Musgrave," he said coldly. "It's all nonsense for me to stay here any longer. There is a mistake somewhere. Your daughter has made up her mind, and—the fact is I feel very much like a fool."

Mrs. Musgrave was very sorry to see him so much agitated; although even she was aware that his agitation was due to wounded vanity rather than to the despair of a lover.

"You must make allowances for her, Mr. Fenwick. She does not quite know her own mind yet."

"Possibly not; but I know mine," he returned with severe politeness. "She knows her own mind sufficiently well to give me the feeling that it would be waste of time to expect her to change it. I don't mean to try."

"Now, now, my dear Mr. Fenwick, you are going to act very impetuously. If you care about her as I think you do, you will give her time to get over the disappointment she has experienced. I won't allow you to decide in this off-hand way. You must wait a little."

Fenwick took out his watch, and looked at the time.

"I don't think it is worth while bothering any more; and from what she has said to me, I believe that it would be a mistake to accept her yes now, even if she gave it. I am going by the four o'clock train."

Mrs. Musgrave would not believe that he was in earnest.

"You have just got into some silly quarrel,"

she said, smiling pleasantly. "You are not to take the afternoon train, and you are not to go away until you have made it all up."

"I am going by the four o'clock train," repeated Fenwick.

"Do not be ridiculous—if you can help it. You will do nothing of the kind if you have any regard for me."

"I have a great deal of regard for you, Mrs. Musgrave; but I have some also for myself. Goodbye."

She saw that he was in a passion, and made no further attempt to delay him, feeling sure that he would return in the evening. But he did not return, and, contrary to all her experience of his character, he did take the four o'clock train.

Previous to that, however, he had met Miss Dinwuddie; and this was what she wrote in hot haste to her sister:

"Shut your mouth, and open your eyes and all your ears—there never was such fun! What do you think?—Mr. Fenwick has *proposed* to me, and I have said—

"Would you like very much to know what I said? I am not yet quite sure whether it is all a joke or a dream, or some nonsense of that sort.

But there is the fact: he said, 'Will you marry me?' And I said, 'Yes, sir, if you please.'

"I don't know how it came about, and he has started for home, so that I have no opportunity of reassuring myself; but as near as I can make out I'll write down what he said and what I said.

"I really never thought that such a thing was possible; but you see it is always the least expected thing that occurs. I told you that he was worrying Ellie, and that I believed he didn't care a bit about her; and certainly she didn't care about him. But Mrs. Musgrave held him fast, and urged him on. Then after that chat we had in the billiard-room, he was really determined to square matters.

"To-day he did it. He saw Ellie; then he saw her mother and then he came to me. I was in the billiard-room making believe to have a game by myself.

"'Oh, I am so glad to see you,' says I, 'for I have just made such a lovely shot. I am quite sure you would have been proud of your pupil.'

"'I can't stay to talk to you about shots,' he said as sulky as possible. 'I want to get away from this infernal place.'

"'Why, what is the matter, Mr. Fenwick?'

was my exclamation as I dropped the cue on the table. 'Are you not well—you are looking very pale.'

"I don't know whether I am looking pale or not; but I have just discovered that I have been made a fool of—and I don't like it. You won't make a fool of me, will you?"

"He said that so piteously that I really could not resent the way in which, whilst he held my hand, he drew me close to him—just for sympathy of course.

"I could not help feeling interested. You must keep in mind that the mother has all along led him to believe that Ellie would change her mind and accept him. (I don't think they would have done together at all. However, we have no need to consider that now.)

"I do not know exactly what I said to him; but he seemed to be glad to have somebody who cared a little about him and—you can understand it yourself. Here was a poor fellow who was deeply in love. (I wonder if he was deeply in love. My own impression is that he was not. My impression is that he was moved by Ellie in some way that we cannot understand and that he proposed to her because he could not help himself.)

“ ‘Will you take pity on me?—Will you take me for better or worse?—I am sure it will be the worse, but we need not mind about that just now.’

“What could I say to such an appeal?

“There was only one answer and that was—

“ ‘Yes.’

“And so I have accepted him, and so we are going to be married. It will be an awful surprise for Mrs. Musgrave, and she will be fearfully indignant with me. But you can’t help these sort of things and we must make the best of it.

“In any case I think Hugh and I will get on together. I am quite sure that he and Ellie never would have done so.

“Now you are not to blame me, I have done what I believe to be a kindly action, and before two months have passed Ellie herself will thank me.

“Yours, &c.,

“C. D.”

Two months after that letter was written there was another great gathering at Cluden Peel, greater than the one which celebrated the election

of the son and heir of the house to represent Gartburn in Parliament. This second gathering was to celebrate the happy marriage of Hugh Fenwick, M.P., and Miss Dinwuddie of Maclellan House, Kirkcudbright.

Mrs. Musgrave never forgave them—they had deceived her so! And she never *quite* forgave herself for having contrived all those clever manœuvres which had directly tended to bring about the issues they had been designed to prevent. She never again tried to be clever.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A BLESSING.

ARMOUR had been waiting so long for some sign that she remembered him that the sight of her handwriting was like a glimpse of sunshine in a day of cloud. He tore open the envelope—the sunshine disappeared and the clouds gathered round him, wrapping him up so close that he could not move for a little while.

Then came the burning passion of the man—the indignation, the disbelief, the madness and bitterness of feeling that he had been mistaken in

this woman in whom he had recognised all that was lovely, all that was true.

Of course he had said to himself that if she should change her mind he would not care.

But now?—

The change had come and where were all the promises of self-sacrifice he had given to himself?

Where now the noble pride which taught him to say—"If she cares more for another than for me, she could not have been happy with me, and that would have made me miserable? I ought to be grateful—most grateful to her for having the courage to tell me before it was too late that she had made a mistake. Had I discovered afterwards that she only held to her word because she had given it and not because her heart was with it, what agony we must both have suffered!

"Might I not have been seized with the passion which destroyed my father and cursed the woman I loved? . . . I shall tell her that I thank her. I shall wish her with all my heart the happiness which I would have striven so hard to give her."

But he could not do that. The most he could do was to be silent and try with all his might to stifle the bitterness within him.

And the days passed and he was silent.

Will he make no sign? Did he care so little for her—did he think that she cared so little for him that it was not necessary to send one parting word? How cruel he must be—how thoughtless—how without faith he must be! She would never have believed that he could read those icy words and not desire to say something which might take the chill off them. But men are so different from women! They feel nothing:—Women feel everything!

.

He did not know what to say to himself: he did not know what to say to Grannie. He knew that she was fretting and he knew the cause. But in the bright sunshine of the summer day he passed out from his room into the garden, and there was Grannie seated in her easy-chair, and Ellie kneeling, hands clasping hers.

When he appeared, she sprang to her feet in confusion.

"I came to speak to Grannie," she said bashfully.

He put his arms round her and drew her close to him.

"You came to speak to me, Ellie—we shall be happy."

She nestled her head upon his breast with smiling confidence in his prediction.

"I thought we were never to speak together again, Grannie — do you know what's going on? The princess and the lamp are found again."

"Ou, ay, I ken fine," said Grannie gently, "and I'm rael proud. The Lord is aye guid to us when we are guid to oorsels."

They were happy and the Fiscal should have had nothing more to trouble him. But—oh, that terrible "But" which comes like the demon "If" into every life—but conscience followed him and conscience told him that he was doing wrong—wrong to his own child—wrong to the man who was to make her his wife.

Should he do this? He, a just man in all ways—should he become by deliberate thought a criminal?

If he remained silent they would be happy. If he spoke they would be miserable. Silence or speech then was his course.

He was only a man and he decided upon silence.

But the great gloom hung over him. He walked about knowing that his agony made others happy and he was silent.

As he passed down the road, riding very

slowly, there were the trees making curious shadows across the path; then low down lay the river, glistening in the afternoon sunlight. Before him lay the shadow, and he was going straight into it. Behind him, up on the hill, was the sunlight, and he was passing away from it.

Up the steep hill came a merry ploughboy, whistling at intervals whilst he looked the glad sunlight right in the face, and he passed the man, old in his sorrow, whose head was bowed towards his horse's neck, but whose eyes saw him as he passed.

The boy said to himself:

"Eh, man, but I wish I had your horse."

The man said;

"Eh, my laddie, what life's in you! What would I give to have your step and your faith. . . . Can I ever find it again? No. The life lies far back that was mine. You, my lad, are walking up into the sunlight, I am walking into the shadow. . . . But they are happy. I am glad. . . . Suffer what I may—thank God."

The minister had a great discussion with Matthey, and this time they were very near quarrelling in earnest. What the minister said was :

"Look here, Matthey--if you will not behave yourself, I am going to marry Grannie Armour. Then there will be none of your nonsense about the house."

Matthey drew himself up, and, with what can only be described as a complacently dignified movement of his hand, said:

"You've been sayin' for ever so many years that you were gaun to get married. I dinna believe you--and what's mair, I'll no allow it. You and me have aye been thegither, preachin' and prayin', for mair nor thirty years, and I'm no gaun to let you gang awa' frae me. Noo, just sit doon till I speak to you."

Mr. Moffat, grinning to himself, and enjoying the joke, sat down with every appearance of the utmost humility.

"I'm ready for the sermon noo, Matthey."

"Ah—and I daursay you're thinkin' about next Sabbath. Well, maybe it'll be of use to you. What I was gaun to say is just this—do you no ken that you have been interfering with Mr. Fenwick, and he was a great friend o' yours, and he and all the Fenwicks of Cluden Peel will be doon upon you. They will never forgive you. Weel,"—(here Matthey posed himself lecturing his master, with forefinger raised towards his nose—

a movement very common with the minister, and which Matthey had caught) "do you see what it means to me? I'm just gaun to be thrown out o' a comfortable place that Mr. Fenwick meant to gie me."

"And what was that, Matthey?"

"Weel, you're no to be angry, but he said to me that if he married Miss Musgrave I was to ha'e the Hame farm."

"And you would leave me?" cried the minister.

Matthey's brows contracted, and there was a peculiar movement of the muscles of the cheeks as if the man were trying to suppress some laughter.

"Just that. Did you no say that you were gaun to marry Grannie Armour, and do you think it would be possible for me to bide here if you brought a mistress into the house? I just wouldna do it, and if you're thinking about taking a wife there's no reason whatever that I shouldna be thinkin' o' takin' a place mysel'. Hows'ever, what I said was just this—I canna leave the minister even to be maister o' the best farm in the coonty. Me an' him maun gang on thegither to the end. Noo, what do you say?"

The minister sprang up from his seat and placed his hands on Matthey's shoulders.

"I'm going to write a letter, Matthey, and I'll show it to you when it's done. Stay with me."

Matthey obediently arranged things in the room, and waited until his master finished the letter.

This was what the minister wrote:

"MY DEAR ARMOUR,—I have just been having a discussion with Matthey, who objects very strongly to my getting married, and if it had not been for his objection it was my intention to ask Grannie to come away and be the mistress of the Manse, simply that you might come home to a clear house.

"However, as that cannot be, and as I have been down to see Grannie, we must just be content to go on as we have been doing all along. Grannie is very happy, and much pleased to know that you are happy too.

"But a honeymoon tour should not be disturbed by unnecessary correspondence; so this is to be a short letter. (I can hear you and Mistress Ellie saying 'Thank goodness.') Everybody is full of wonder still at the way things have come about; but everybody wishes well to you and your winsome bride.

"For myself I am content to think of you in

your great joy with feelings of sincere pleasure; and I believe that all the sins of your forbears are atoned for by the honour of your own life.

"Stick to that—be clean in yourself, and all will be well. I suppose you will think that's a bit from a sermon, but it isn't—it's what I'm really feeling and thinking. I have watched your course from boyhood on through manhood, and when I die I should like to say, as you may do, 'I have wronged no man—or woman either.'

"Matthey says that that's me speaking to him. Never you heed, it's common sense.

"Tawtie Pate and Gow, the smith, have made up their minds to have a bonfire when you come back, and it's my opinion they'll burn the mill, on account of its unluckiness. However that may be, take my blessing, both of you, and be sure that I am aye your sincere and good friend,

"PATRICK MOFFAT."

And so—good-bye.

THE END.

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